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Official Records

15th plenary meeting
Friday, 28 September 2012, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić .... (Serbia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Palau), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): My country extends heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his assumption of his responsibilities as President of the General Assembly at this crucially important session. We also express our appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of the State of Qatar, who left an indelible mark on the General Assembly.

We meet again in the quest for development, equity, and peace. Last year, our debate took place against the backdrop of rapid, often violent, geopolitical change, as well as continuing economic instability and uncertainty. Last year's general debate, though marked by winds of change and clouds of uncertainty, was not without hope and optimism. Member States anticipated meaningful progress at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development. We predicted a robust and legally binding arms trade treaty. We embraced popular, home-grown calls for political change. And we scanned the economic horizon for encouraging signs of recovery and growth.

Today, global optimism, though still enduringly present, is in scarcer supply, as the international community has encountered the challenges of a new world and found itself wanting. Our global structures, including the United Nations, are faced with changes of a scope, scale and rapidity that substantially outpace our ability to react, partly exceed our capacity to respond, and demand a level of courage, principle and decisiveness that is not sufficiently matched by our political will. Today, we are not merely spectators watching a moment of global change; rather, we are nations in the valley of decision, confronted with two questions that we must answer: "What is our vision of tomorrow's post-crisis, post-conflict world?" And: "How, collectively, can we achieve that vision?"

Our avoidance of these fundamental questions threatens to set our Assembly adrift and rudderless, shirking responsibility and afraid of action. We must resist the temptation to bury our heads in the shifting sands of meaningless resolutions while we studiously disregard our imperative quest for a unifying principle

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and purpose. To succumb to such a temptation would be to condemn this institution to a future marked not by new ideas, but new rationalizations. Our noble battle of ideas will descend into a battalion of excuses; of blame-sharing and buck-passing; of soundbites disguised as insights. Such a future, which we are on a path to realize, would do a disservice to our respective States, our international obligations, and the proud history of the United Nations. We would, by our impotence, acquiesce to the possible obsolescence of this Organization, as peoples and Governments would, justifiably or not, turn elsewhere for the solutions to global challenges. Such a future can and must be vigorously avoided, in the interest of our peoples' collective advancement and humanity.

In our Caribbean region, the global economic and financial meltdown continues to be felt most acutely by the poor, the youth, the elderly and the vulnerable, who bear no responsibility for the rampant financial speculation and unregulated movement of capital that spurred the crisis. Today, four years into an externally imposed meltdown which has produced negative or marginal growth across the Caribbean, our region is forced to contemplate the implications of a potential "lost decade" of development.

Our region is not immune to the economic pressures and fissures that have turned other parts of the world into tinderboxes of social unrest and political upheaval. Our citizens, who have nobly struggled under the weight of externally sourced contraction, austerity and hardship, are not possessed of limitless patience or endurance. Our hard-won development gains are in jeopardy, and our settled political stability is in possible peril. The international community cannot ignore our plight based on a distorted calculus of middle-income status and relative prosperity, or on simplistic, even offensive, stereotypes of Caribbean paradises. Small, highly indebted middle-income developing countries, like those in the Caribbean, which are very vulnerable to natural disasters and international economic convulsions, have special concerns which the international community is obliged to address properly, in partnership with the peoples of our region. External shocks derived from nature or the workings of an uneven, casino capitalism, are not merely episodic to our Caribbean; they are a constant feature of our regional economies.

Central to our urgent re-examination and reconfiguration of the existing economic apparatus is the recognition that our modern context and individual national characteristics do not lend themselves to strict classical or Keynesian economic prescriptions or their variants. In the case of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and our Caribbean neighbours, our peculiarities of small size, openness and vulnerability require uniquely home-grown economic policies that are rooted not in any prevailing ideology or fashionable theories from outside, but in a sensible, flexible and focused practicality.

We have little interest in esoteric arguments about the role of the State in economic activity, because, historically, our national Governments have been a force for good in the stimulation, diversification and growth of our economies in tandem with the private and cooperative sectors. While we welcome and solicit assistance and consultations with the relevant institutions and organizations, such consultations ought to be free of the type of textbook orthodoxies or formulaic prescriptions that are inapplicable to our times and circumstances. Our path to development must be our own.

The cause of development, as a goal and as a right, has suffered from the neglect of the international community in recent, post-crisis years. Within the United Nations system, the current budget for peacekeeping dwarfs the resources allocated to fostering development, even as we recognize that most conflict is rooted in underdevelopment. The age-old pledges of development assistance have been skirted, and their fulfilment delayed, by States that cite their own struggles with the global economic fallout. As a result, even as we contemplate post-2015 sustainable development goals, it is painfully apparent that the Millennium Development Goals will not be met across large swaths of our planet.

The poor, especially in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, can hardly be expected to wait any longer for relief and sustainable development. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is thankful to the nations and organizations that have found it possible to continue extending their hand in cooperation with our people, even in difficult economic times. The support and assistance of those States and organizations is a mark of their friendship, solidarity and strong global citizenship.

The prolonged global economic uncertainties have propelled the international economy into a dangerous new phase. Even the International Monetary Fund has so concluded. In the process, the crisis has found the principals wanting, even unaware of the extant condition, with no clear idea as to the way forward. In both economics and politics, the ancien régime is passing. The discerning acknowledge that a transition is at large, but immense challenges arise immediately from at least four pertinent queries: first, is the transition manageable, or must it be played out in a chaotic manner? Secondly, assuming that the transition is manageable, how is it to be managed in the most efficacious way, and in whose interest? Thirdly, is this transition a dead end? And fourthly, given that the transition itself, like all human conditions, is dynamic, what is the destination of this transition?

It is a truism that men and women make history not in circumstances of their own choosing, but in those which they meet, which they inherit, and which emerge on their watch. Noteworthy is the fact that the histories of nations and the ghosts of the dead weigh heavily on the brains of the living. Often unacknowledged is the abiding truth that each people possesses its own history, its own legitimacy, its own nobility and its own trajectory for further ennoblement.

Unfortunately, the power of some to define things globally distorts these elemental truths. It is well known that the lion's view of history does not coincide with that of the gazelle or the lamb; the elephant and the ant do not see things eye to eye. But human beings possess the capacity to go beyond the limitations of the animal kingdom. That is fundamentally why we have gathered together under the rubric of the United Nations, with a Charter so uplifting and magnificent in its ideals and purposes as to constitute the best hope for the human race. Arrogant and unbridled power, from whatever source, is thus to be contained. It is always wise to remember that the greatest exercise of power is restraint in the use of that power. That is true within and between nations. It is the surest way for the malevolent across the globe to be accorded no space to flourish and to be defeated.

It is within this context that the text of a prosperous, safe, independent Palestinian State must be written alongside a secure State of Israel, living in friendship and non-belligerence. This is a matter of grave urgency; the injustice meted out to Palestine must end now. So, too, must continue our global quest for interfaith dialogue and an alliance of civilizations, initiated by the Governments of Qatar and Turkey, respectively.

Similarly, let us not forget our pledge of solidarity to Haiti. Likewise, reparations for the genocides committed against indigenous peoples and for African slavery must continue to be pursued vigorously on our international agenda.

All of that and more is achievable by the United Nations. Thus, our collective will can bear fruit abundantly through the strengths and possibilities of wise leadership, peaceful dialogue among and between sovereign nations, international cooperation and regional compacts.

Closer to home, our developmental and political partnerships increasingly reflect a spirit of strengthened regional integration and greater South-South cooperation. In the immediate post-colonial phase of our national development, the nations of the Caribbean and Latin America often have had stronger and closer relationships with distant colonial Powers and developed nations than we did with the countries in our immediate neighbourhood. After centuries of colonial conquest, settlement and exploitation, our deepening bonds of friendship, cooperation and integration within the Caribbean and Latin America are a fundamental manifestation of our States' growing independence and political maturity.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines enjoys membership in a number of interconnected circles of regional integration. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is in an economic union with a shared currency, judiciary and nascent representative Assembly. The 15-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM) also furthers the cause of Caribbean integration with important implications for trade and the free movement of people. Our State is a proud member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, which has created bonds of socioeconomic solidarity and cooperation among Caribbean, Central and South American States. The Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, the Association of Caribbean States, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States are also home-grown manifestations of our peoples' desire to forge linkages and partnerships with our regional brothers and sisters.

The strength and genuine cohesion of those growing regional integration initiatives is built on a solid foundation of shared experiences and values, which deserve the support of the United Nations. The members of OECS and CARICOM are bastions of good governance, democracy and the rule of law, and we share those experiences and aspirations with our South and Central American sister States, which have also established unshakeable foundations of democracy and good governance after fitful periods of political unrest and foreign interference in the past. The upcoming 7 October presidential election in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is but one example of the manner in which that country and the region continue to institutionalize popular, participatory democratic systems that reflect and respect the will of the people.

As we strengthen relations with our immediate neighbours, we remain deeply committed to our historical ties and traditional friendships. The bonds that we share with our friends in Europe, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States are as strong as they are mutually beneficial. As a multi-island nation, the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have always been highly migratory and outward-looking — so much so that even the words of our national anthem memorialize our proclivity for travel to distant lands. Many of the largest and most vibrant cities of our nationals exist not in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, but in major metropolitan hubs, including those in Brooklyn, Toronto and London. Those productive and hard-working centres, and many others, have immeasurably enriched their adopted homes and provided needed remittances to relatives in the land of their birth. We remain grateful to those friendly States that have opened their doors and embrace to our migrants, and we view the ongoing, hassle-free movement of our peoples back and forth as the truest testament of our friendship and solidarity.

The recent increase in regional conflicts and unrest around the world cannot be ignored. The hopefulness and idealistic optimism that were much in evidence during the early days of the so-called Arab Spring have been replaced by a cynical fatalism and rampant opportunism in many important quarters. In other continents, some nations flirt with border wars, while others grapple with insidious and barbaric terrorism. In the midst of the global upheaval, we have witnessed the aggressive re-emergence of those that would seek to reshape the world in their own image and to their own purposes. Would-be interventionists, unilateralists and hegemons, both new and old, have rushed to fill and exploit political vacuums, to settle ancient grudges and to strengthen their grip on global or regional power.

It is a pattern that predates colonialism and the Cold War and one that once again brings into focus many of the United Nations founding principles. Those principles cannot be ignored, reinterpreted or sacrificed on the altar of poll-driven political expediency and electoral ambition. We have bound ourselves together in the solemn goal of promoting peace, not fostering wars; of self-determination, not unilateral intervention; of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, not the callous disregard for the well-being of our fellow human beings. To depart from those principles, explicitly or by implication, would be to abandon the better angels of our nature and to succumb to the forces that made this institution necessary in the first place.

The war against global terror is real, and it is being fought by all responsible States on multiple fronts. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is firm and unequivocal in its rejection of all forms of terrorist activity and its revulsion at the methods and twisted logic that accompany that barbarism. Our friends and brothers in the United States of America are unfortunately and disproportionately targeted by those repulsive killers, most recently in the deeply saddening murder of Christopher Stevens, the United States Ambassador to Libya, and some of his staff. We support unreservedly the determination of the United States to bring Ambassador Stevens's killers to justice.

At the same time, we are baffled by the continued reference to the Republic of Cuba in some quarters as a State sponsor of terrorism. The undisputed evidence is that Cuba neither supports nor harbours terrorists of any type. Indeed, the Cuban Government, itself a victim of orchestrated terror campaigns, has cooperated on numerous occasions with the Governments of both allies and ideological opponents in the fight against terrorism. It has also played a useful and constructive role in facilitating peace talks between Governments and armed rebel groups in Latin America. Those facts are not contested. Therefore, to label Cuba a State sponsor of terrorism, in any context, is to cheapen our shared global struggle against that insidious scourge.

In his famous 1960 speech to the General Assembly, then President Fidel Castro observed that hysteria could go to any length and was capable of making the most far-fetched and absurd claims. That particular absurd and far-fetched claim, like the absurdity that undergirds the continued economic embargo against Cuba, is one that is best abandoned.

The fascinating rapprochement unfolding across the Taiwan straits between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan lends practical weight to the reasonable and overdue call for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. My country and several others in the Caribbean and Central America bear witness to Taiwan's principled conduct of its intergovernmental relations. Surely the time has now come for this exemplar of the magnificent Chinese civilization to be permitted to participate in the work of various agencies of this world body.

Allow me to turn to certain existential challenges facing my country, my region, and the world. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is angered by the continuing and inexcusable failure of the States assembled in this Hall to move decisively towards a meaningful and legally binding climate change treaty. Entire nations, represented here today as friends and equals, may simply cease to exist as a result of our inaction and political cowardice. Other nations, including my own, are already the victims of increasingly intense and frequent storms, hurricanes and weather events. These changes not only threaten our way of life but risk reversing our recent development progress.

The islands of our planet are at war against climate change, warming temperatures and rising seas. That war is not a future event, it is a present-day and ongoing battle. As all of us in this Assembly are aware, it is a war that we are currently losing. The survival of our islands is at stake, and the responsibility for immediate change lies undisputedly with those whose reckless pollution over generations has led us to the brink of catastrophe. In a different time and context, Winston Churchill inspired his people with the words "we shall fight on the seas and oceans... we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be". Today, know this: We shall fight the rising seas and encroaching oceans and defend our islands' right to exist at any cost. We call on all nations to join us in the fight, for that is a war that can still be won. Our negotiations to arrest climate change are not merely some arcane academic or diplomatic pursuit, and they cannot be treated as some interminable, run-of-the-mill United Nations process. Let us set aside narrow, short-term interests and act as we are capable of acting: for the benefit and protection of all mankind.

Another existential threat whose solution has fallen victim to United Nations paralysis is our common pursuit of a global, robust and binding arms trade treaty. In the Caribbean, over 70 per cent of homicides are committed with firearms, a remarkable statistic for a region that produces not one single gun or bullet. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has a largely unarmed constabulary and lacks a standing army, yet we struggle daily against an influx of illicit and untraceable firearms that pose a grave threat to our national security and way of life. The producers of firearms, as well as the source and destination markets for illicit narcotics, can and must cooperate to restrict and regulate the international flow of small arms, light weapons and ammunition. While we have failed in our initial attempt to forge an arms trade treaty, I call on members at this session of the General Assembly to redouble their efforts to negotiate a binding agreement in this matter before we reconvene next September.

This year it is imperative, too, that the United Nations continue its focused work in the fight against non-communicable diseases, which the Caribbean Community has rightly placed at the forefront of the global agenda.

The people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are strong and fiercely independent. Ours is an independence forged in the heroic struggles of our indigenous and Garifuna peoples against genocide and hardened in the fires of our resistance to slavery, indentureship, and colonial and neocolonial domination. Our strength, independence and sovereignty do not permit us to look to the United Nations or any other country or group of countries for the solutions to our own problems and challenges. However, as a small State in an interconnected world, we recognize that many of the difficulties we face have been born and incubated beyond our national boundaries. The United Nations therefore is our primary multilateral forum to address and confront those externally imposed challenges.

My statement today is not intended merely to chronicle the global ills that have befallen Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. No. It is a call for principled and practical global action to address and resolve these problems. To do so, we stand ready to work with the President and with all States in this Assembly to effect meaningful change throughout our planet. As the great novelist Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality of those who seek to change a world which yields most painfully to change". Today, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines calls on this body, and on all nations assembled here, to harness that essential moral courage to produce change in a world whose potential is limitless, and whose problems are soluble. The rhetoric of change and hope may lack the cachet that it enjoyed hitherto, but we still believe that our peoples and Governments possess within them the courage and conviction collectively to change and materially improve the condition of our nations' citizens.

Let us at this sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly establish conclusively that that faith is well placed. We move with our burdens from yesterday. We go forward with our strengths and possibilities tomorrow.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Kenny Davis Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Kenny Davis Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Kenny Davis Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Anthony (Saint Lucia): I would first like to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this year's session. I also wish to place on record Saint Lucia's thanks to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his contribution as President of the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session.

I would like to underscore the words of the President, of which we should be continually reminded, concerning the fact that peace is not merely the absence of war. Indeed, poverty and prejudice are the flint and tinder for violent feud and furore. And so we embrace your suggested theme, for while in the Caribbean we generally know peace, we are aware of the real struggle of humankind to achieve peace in the face of disaster, injustice, inequity and conflict.

Beyond this Hall lies a beautiful world. And whatever the flaws and failures of mankind, we still are blessed to be given a world from which we can seek life and livelihoods. It is difficult to imagine at times that even in the face of turmoil, decimation and acts of brutality and calamity, humankind has progressed over the millennia. That is what must give us hope and confidence for the future: that we have been through this before and have come through colossal tragedies, unexplainable disasters, world wars and famine, and still we are here. Our civilization continues to thrive. However, we can only succeed if we recognize and celebrate our shared humanity. This, therefore, must be a world that continuously affirms all human lives, a world that recognizes our collective endowment, that celebrates our ingenuity and our enterprise. A world, as is said in southern Africa, that is imbued with *ubuntu*.

Each year for the past seven decades, we have sat here as equals, everyone with a voice, everyone with a say. Our size, whether defined by geography, population or both, has no relevance, albeit only temporarily for the purposes of this discourse and dialogue. And even while some have sat here longer, we can all embrace a commonality that is not transient or mutable. But even so, we can at times forget that behind every country's representative are real people with real lives, who seek cherished moments despite their sea of despair.

And let there be no doubt that, even when our leaders come here to speak, we will have, in all our own countries, differences of opinion, of philosophy, of faith. Yet despite all this, the beauty of democracy is that we can embrace a common pursuit: the pursuit of happiness, prosperity and enjoyment of life. Our philosophies should therefore never destroy that pursuit; they should affirm it. Our faiths should never tear this apart, they should form and fashion souls of compassion, understanding and tolerance.

For our ancestors, from Africa to Asia, from the Arctic to the Amazon, all knew conflict and what it cost in their lives. We know what it costs humankind right now. And we should all know that history has repeatedly shown us that warfare is not the best way to solve our problems. So then do we ignore the bombs and guns if they are not heard on our streets, in our cities and parks and playgrounds? Should the girl in Aleppo or Benghazi not be able to share the same opportunities and dreams and hopes as a boy in Arlington or Birmingham?

No one expects a naive world, with utopian leaders. Nor do we suggest that our world will not have conflict, for disagreement is inevitable in all aspects of life. However, I ask that we have the courage to be bold about the world we want. I ask that we act when we know we can. I ask that those leaders who hold the seats of higher authority always remember the minorities, those who are easily forgotten, easily marginalized, easily wiped out. There should never be a season for injustice, never a season for corruption, never a season for poverty, never a season for brutality and never a season for torment.

Saint Lucia therefore welcomes a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Syrian Republic and an immediate end to what is clearly carnage, a human tragedy. We continue to support the efforts of the Special Envoy and the Secretary-General in this body's efforts to induce the parties to focus on coming to the table for negotiations, with a view to finding a path towards a resolution of the conflict that is acceptable to the majority of the people of Syria and takes into account the necessity of ensuring the welfare and interest of minorities in that State.

We are, of course, also very concerned about the resort to violence in the Middle East, aimed at confronting either religious or ideological contentions. We condemn all attempts at disparagement of religious prophets, deities, symbols or practices, and we appeal for tolerance and understanding. In the same vein, we deplore the brutal murder in Libya of the Ambassador of the United States, and we share that country's pain and anguish. Religious intolerance is combustible and dangerous and ensnares even those nations far from the theatres of conflict.

Saint Lucia is very conscious of the active attempts in the Middle East to develop new systems of governance, as recent systems appear, in some countries, to have outlived their usefulness for the majority of their citizens. Apart from our commitment to global and regional peace, we must also recognize that turbulence in the Middle East has the undoubted effect of distorting the price of the dominant global commodity, oil, and that those distortions harm the interests and development processes of large and small countries alike. The world desperately needs a peaceful Middle East. We express our hope for the continued evolution of peaceful and consensus approaches to issues of governance in that area.

Saint Lucia believes that all efforts to promote peace and prosperity for everyone, while of course protecting the health of our planet, should be embraced. The Government of Saint Lucia is well aware of the determination of the Chinese people to unify their country, as signalled to the world when China took its rightful place in the United Nations. In that context, Saint Lucia welcomes the emerging dialogue and cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan. Such cross-strait dialogue and cooperation will surely facilitate global harmony. We look forward to a continued evolution of the ongoing peaceful rapprochement among the Chinese people as they search to unify their civilization.

Saint Lucia also wishes to support the calls for Africa to gain its rightful permanent representation on the Security Council, as supported by the Presidents of Mali and South Africa. As we recognize the perils of conflict and warfare in Africa so too should we recognize the ability of Africa to bring peace to itself. The voice of one billion people and that of an entire continent should no longer go unheard.

Saint Lucia welcomes the resolution of the longstanding dispute in the Sudan, the achievement of self-determination for the new State of South Sudan and its introduction into the community of nations. It is pleasing that that process has occurred in a context in which the States of the African continent have now themselves been creating new spaces in a bid to take advantage of the development of the continent's resources in a changing economic environment.

We cannot have global collaboration and cooperation, and start anew unless extreme disparities are reduced or eliminated. So it is necessary to determine the causes and respond purposefully in tackling the inequities that exist in the world. While one of the obvious building blocks for development is that of good governance — political structures that are ethical and not fuelled by greed and abuse — and while we can strengthen the rule of law, ensure property rights and hold fair elections, those measures by themselves do not and cannot secure democracy. While democracy has no place for dictators or demigods, it is still rather meaningless to a person with no food on the table. The dispossessed will have no passion and no will. The depressed will not vote, nor will the downtrodden.

We cannot continue to ignore the age-old injustices of slavery, of forcing people into labour and of decimating their culture and identity. Many of us here today are the descendants of the survivors of slavery. As a part of that recognition, we support the Government of Jamaica in calls for the recognition of the impacts of the transatlantic slave trade and the need for a frank dialogue on the status of people of African descent. Furthermore, like Africa, we all need the opportunity to trade equally and fairly. We all know that the death of the Doha talks was due to the unwillingness of some nations to relent on large-scale subsidies on farming and agriculture.

One of the injustices that is a relic of an era of fear and dispute long gone is the embargo imposed upon the people of Cuba, purely for purposes of political retribution and punishment. I must take this opportunity to reiterate the conclusion of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as a whole, most recently in December 2011, that it is time to end the embargo imposed on the Republic of Cuba by the United States. Saint Lucia is part of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and wishes to pursue the fullest measure of economic integration in the hemisphere, as an instrument of our own economic growth and in order to maximize economic and social cooperation in the area. Blockades and embargoes, in that context, are anachronistic and outmoded. In an era of globalization and economic liberalization they cannot be tolerated or justified.

Another relic of colonialism is that of our Caribbean Community member, Haiti. The suffering of the people of Haiti can only be matched by their perseverance. It is a country that was tormented into paying compensations to its former colonial master. That was an extraordinary and crude example of trade loss. Today the world's first black independent country is the Western hemisphere's poorest nation. It is still very much deserving of the support of the United Nations in overcoming its recent pains and indigence brought on by the earthquake of 12 January 2010. It should not be forgotten. Haiti is a member of the CARICOM family of nations, and so we pay due respect and regard to those countries in our hemisphere that came to the support and assistance of Haiti in its hour of need.

We in the Caribbean continue to experience the challenge of our skilled population seeking to settle in regions to the north, where they are generally greeted with open arms. Meanwhile, we also have to contend with the reverse flow of guns which, owing to the narcotics trade, is finding its way into our jurisdictions. We cannot have internal peace in our islands if our young people are too easily being given guns. We raised the matter as one of great concern to our security at the Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, in April this year.

It is now clear that the current policies to combat the consumption and trafficking of illicit drugs across and within borders have failed, creating yet another human tragedy of immense consequence. Lives are being lost either to guns or to the consumption of drugs. We remain resolute in wanting the whole matter of the drug trade to be reviewed. Collectively, we must craft new solutions to this problem. We also wish to place on record our continued concern about the practice of deporting seasoned criminals back to our small States, without any regard for the capacity of our internal security arrangements.

In all this there is a sobering reality for the leader of any small State like Saint Lucia. Even as I have the distinction of standing here today, I know that many of the decisions that affect our world and my country are still made in the capitals of other countries, sometimes unilaterally and sometimes multilaterally by groups of 5 or 8 or 20 or 30. It is said that 80 per cent of the world's trade and economic activity is accounted for by 20 countries. I can assure everyone that Saint Lucia, indeed all of the Caribbean Basin, lies beyond the limits of that geopolitical circle. With few or no resources, diplomatic or otherwise, Saint Lucia can only speak with its moral courage, authority and convictions.

Small islands are special places with special peculiarities that make us both unique and vulnerable. Still, we know that, if there is a willingness to support their growth and development, then small islands can be success stories. Consider for instance that our 15-member Caribbean Community has a combined population of 17 million and an economy of about $89 billion. The United States territory of Puerto Rico, itself part of the greater Caribbean, has a gross domestic product of about $100 billion. Those numbers clearly suggest that, given support in trade and investment, though we may be small, our economies could grow. They could find sustainability.

The Caribbean Community has continuously made the point that many small States are deceptively classed as middle-income merely on the basis of per capita income. A country the size of Saint Lucia, with the vulnerabilities that we face, should not be subjected to such a measuring tool for determining whether a State can stand on its own.

For instance, Saint Lucia experienced a category 2 hurricane in 2010 that caused damage totalling nearly 30 per cent of our gross domestic product. As in the case of other small States like ours, we were then forced to become even more indebted as we borrowed to replace infrastructure, such as arterial roads and bridges, without which our country's economy would have faced further contraction. On top of that, we were further impacted by unilateral domestic measures which, showing insensitivity to such matters as our dependence on tourism, some major developed States implemented, making us an even less desirable tourist destination.

Other islands that are highly dependent on international financial services are now suffering as a result of the attempts by some States to sully their reputations. Though we live in a beautiful part of the world, the reduction of foreign direct investment flows due to the global economic crisis, and the recent announcement by the World Trade Organization that it has cut its forecast for global trade growth from 3.7 per cent to 2.5 per cent, can cause the outlook to look grim.

This means that development cannot be just about assistance and that small States require there to be some fairness and balance in the world economic space. From the point of view of the developing countries, the collapse of the Doha Round was a disappointing portent of the difficult times to come in the discussions between developed and developing countries. This trend was typified in our hemisphere by the lack of progress in the initiative for a free trade area of the Americas. At the same time, however, there were increasing indications of the emergence of countries in Asia, Africa and the Far East as competitors in global economic competition.

We look to a future in which the United Nations and other global institutions become more targeted and differentiated in their interventions and policies. We look to a world in which the Millennium Development Goals are realized and in which the international community crafts a new post-2015 strategy to tackle the major impediments to growth as well as to promote the major creators of wealth and prosperity.

A major issue is, of course, climate change. As expressed in the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and in the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States held in Barbados in 1994, small States are committed to seeing action taken on climate change and tangible support for the requisite adaptations and interventions needed at all levels.

Within the Caribbean Community, the Liliendaal Declaration issued by Heads of Government in 2009 encapsulated our concerns as small island States subject to major dislocation as a consequence of the threat of climate change. It notes that

> "[the region's] efforts to promote sustainable development and to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), are under severe threat from the devastating effects of climate change and sea-level rise."

In particular, it notes the "increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events" that have resulted in severe damage to the region's resources and socio-economic base, and it emphasizes that

> "dangerous climate change is already occurring in all Small Islands and Low-lying Coastal Developing States (SIDS) regions, including the Caribbean, and that many SIDS will cease to exist without urgent, ambitious and decisive action by the international community".

Saint Lucia is therefore in full support of the conclusions of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil on the challenges and potential solutions to the climate crisis and interrelated factors, which continue to inhibit the achievement of a sustainable world capable of facilitating the activities of all countries, large and small. We are comforted by the words of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that we will secure a legally binding agreement to tackle climate change by 2015. With climate change, we cannot afford any unfinished business, for there is but one world. We also hope that there will be a strong commitment to technology transfer and building local human capacity to deal with climate change and attendant disasters.

Saint Lucia looks forward to the President's tenure in directing the work of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly as one in which the upsurge of conflicts now characterizing our globe will be subjected to meaningful deliberations among our Member States.

Our concern as small countries is that persistent conflicts in respect of issues and problems currently plaguing various regions of the globe can serve to distract our United Nations from devoting both attention and resources to persisting with solutions to the serious problems of economic transition and adjustment now characterizing international economic relations in particular. In the cacophony of regional conflicts that inevitably draw the attention and involvement of the major Powers, the problem of the survival of small countries in the environment of larger States has become more and more intractable.

We in Saint Lucia, as members of the Caribbean Community, look forward to an enhanced cooperation with the countries of a continent in which a large proportion of our population finds its ancestry. We believe that it is possible to pursue this process through the United Nations development institutions in our sphere and on the African continent, and we propose that this be done.

As is now well known, the traditional economic relations under the auspices of the Commonwealth system and the African, Pacific and Caribbean institutional relationships in the context of our trade with Europe are diminishing. We look forward to new avenues of relationships, a task in which the United Nations can be of great assistance to us.

I wish to extend to the President the best wishes and support of my country and delegation for success in his task over the coming year.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Kenny Davis Anthony, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs, Planning and Social Security of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Thinley (Bhutan): As with most sessions of the General Assembly, we are sharing, yet again, our common fears and frustrations in a world that is going wrong. We have no stories, only fleeting moments, with which to fill our sinking hearts with hope in a near or distant future. Ours is a narrative of mounting challenges and doubts. Deep in our hearts, we know that our very survival on this fragile planet is under threat. Yet, we share no common vision and fail to think and act in concert and with faith. And so we find ourselves being overwhelmed by the forces that our irresponsible and discordant actions have unleashed. All that we have achieved individually, as nations, as regions and as a species, faces the threat of loss and reversal. As we argue and falter, the world we have built is falling apart.

Climate is changing and ecosystems are dying. The growing extractive industry spurred by consumerism is exhausting our natural resources, and conflicts are rising in number and more are looming on the horizon. Food and energy are becoming costlier, thereby deepening poverty, inequality and discontent. Economies are unravelling; jobs and security are being lost. For too many, basic human rights and dignity remain beyond reach, and the relevance of Governments and States is in question. Families and communities are losing their resilience, and society is crumbling.

I have reminded the Assembly each year that the solutions we speak of and the measures we take to meet all these challenges and many others plaguing mankind are of the kind that address the symptoms but aggravate the deeper malaise. We are discovering that our problems — be they economic, social, ecological or even political — are interconnected and rooted in the folly of mankind's pursuit of the wrong ends in wrongful ways.

Although the United Nations has been a house of gloom in recent years, it does have its shining moments, projecting rays of hope. The Secretary-General referred to some of these in his address that focused on sounding the alarm about our direction as a human family. One such moment came when this great body resolved that it was time to accept human well-being and happiness as a developmental goal binding all of humankind with a common vision and pursuit, and that it should therefore bring about a holistic, sustainable and inclusive approach to development. That determination caused my country to host a high-level meeting here at the United Nations, which brought together more than 800 participants from all walks of life and all over the world. I was awed, humbled and indeed inspired by the phenomenal response to our call. It was a gathering of extraordinary minds and concerned citizens, moved by the urgent need for change — to blaze a new global path to human happiness and the well-being of life on earth. Yet another moment came just months ago when the General Assembly declared 20 March the International Day of Happiness, thereby bringing together all human beings, at least once a year, to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life and realign our thoughts and actions.

Three months ago, 40,000 representatives gathered for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The outcome document (resolution 66/288, annex) fell far short of what we ought to have achieved. Many saw it as a missed opportunity. Not so for my country and people, who, with minimal expectations, came away with cause for hope. The agreement to develop universal sustainable development goals that would integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development was a substantive outcome, consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions and the efforts that my own country is making. My country hopes to participate actively in this work and sees it as evidence of the growing convergence in the belief that we need to make a break with the past and agree on a collective vision. It is our expectation that such sustainable development goals will steer the post-2015 international development agenda and set humankind on the right course.

What inspired me most at Rio was the indomitable spirit of the hundreds of side events, several of which I was honoured to participate in. These were organized by civil society, grass-roots organizations and the private sector. They came to share best practices and learn from each other, and, more important, to demonstrate that sustainable development is not just an idle dream but that there are individuals and organizations who are breathing and living lives to realize what is profound and necessary. While many of them went home disappointed by the outcome document, I know it is not in their creed to despair. They are the pioneers, taking the lead where Governments fear to tread, and giving courageous expression to humankind's basic goodness and inherent wisdom. They are the torchbearers of a brave new dawn, and we too must have the wisdom and humility to follow their lead.

I am also inspired by the appointment of a high-level panel by the Secretary-General to advise on the global development agenda beyond 2015, which, we note, convened its first meeting earlier this week. Moreover, the launch of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, led by Jeffrey Sachs, is to be welcomed, as is the Secretary-General's personal commitment to enriching the discourse on the future of our race. For our part, I would like to submit that Bhutan has initiated a number of steps in the same direction, pursuant to the recommendation issued at the 2 April High-level Meeting on Well-being and Happiness here at the United Nations.

In July, His Majesty the King of Bhutan established a working group of international experts, comprising over 50 thought leaders, to elaborate the details of the new proposed development paradigm over the coming two years. Their work will be made available for consideration at the sixty-eighth and sixty-ninth sessions of the General Assembly, in 2013 and 2014. Simultaneously, His Majesty the King appointed a national steering committee to guide and support this process.

The working group will elaborate and refine the four themes of well-being and happiness, ecological sustainability, fair distribution, and the efficient use of resources. It will prepare detailed documentation, including thorough literature reviews and examinations of existing best practices on how the new paradigm can work. They will look at its potential accounting and measurement systems, regulatory and financial mechanisms, and trade, governance, and other institutional arrangements. We believe the findings will complement and contribute to the efforts being undertaken by the Secretary-General's high-level panel. Towards this end, my Government also looks forward to the early establishment of the intergovernmental open working group tasked with designing sustainable development goals, as agreed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio.

This month, Bhutan enters its forty-second year of membership in the United Nations. During this period, Bhutan has been a beneficiary of the international community, whose support and generosity have helped to bring about tangible improvements in the lives of the Bhutanese people. In return, Bhutan's contributions to the work of the United Nations have been modest but focused. We have endeavoured to demonstrate our dedication to the causes of peace, development and the rule of law. As a responsible member of the international community, committed to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, Bhutan is now prepared to engage directly in the process of building a more secure world through non-permanent membership in the Security Council. This we regard not only as a privilege, but also as a responsibility of United Nations membership.

It was in this context that in 1999 Bhutan informed the Asian Group of its aspiration to seek membership in the Security Council for the term 2013-2014. Having never held nor sought membership in the Council before, we are convinced that all States, regardless of size, population or level of development, must be permitted the opportunity to contribute by bringing diversity of thought, approach and, indeed, their will to the work of the Council. As a small State, we have always attached the highest importance to multilateralism and the primacy of an effective United Nations that serves the interests of all its Member States.

The election of non-permanent members to the Security Council next month will, I believe, provide the opportunity for the international community, as represented by all Member States, to demonstrate its commitment to the fundamental precept of sovereign equality as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and to the principles of democracy and rotation that give it meaning.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan for the statement he has just made.

Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Lord Tu'ivakano of Nukunuku, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga.

Lord Tu'ivakano of Nukunuku, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Lord Tu'ivakano of Nukunuku, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Lord Tu'ivakano (Tonga): I wish to convey my sincere congratulations to President Jeremić on his election to guide and oversee the important work of the General Assembly at this session. I must also congratulate his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar, for his recently concluded term as the outgoing President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. During his term, he enhanced the profile and work of the General Assembly, and we are pleased that his presidency has decided to carry forward and build upon the shared theme of the settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means.

Our Organization continues to draw strength from the steady leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in facing on a daily basis, together with the Secretariat, the increasingly volatile challenges and fast-evolving crises around the globe with unwavering commitment and steadfast determination.

We remember those Organization personnel who have fallen fulfilling their duty, in the pursuit of our collective aspirations as reflected in the Charter of the United Nations.

We were pleased with the convening earlier this week of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels. In all settings and all circumstances, including with respect to States such as Tonga, the rule of law is a core pillar and a fundamental component of the national fabric.

Tongans take great pride in the enduring qualities of the 1875 Constitution and the early legal codes of 1839 and 1850 as instruments of visionary nation-building and, with reform over time, lasting peace and stability. They also laid the foundation for setting Tonga on a firm footing in the context of international relations with the global powers of the time, and set us on a path that ultimately has led to membership in the global body of our time, the United Nations. Tonga was therefore pleased to join other Member States in adopting the Declaration of the High-level Meeting (resolution 67/1).

To expand and improve the role and impact of the rule of law at the national, regional and international levels requires the expertise and technical assistance available from the United Nations system, the relevant intergovernmental agencies and interested development partners, so as to be coordinated, continuous and coherent.

This week's outcome is a positive development for small jurisdictions such as Tonga in strengthening their capacity to address the political, social, economic and environmental challenges of our time.

Building upon the Secretary-General's historic attendance at last year's meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a further meeting took place this week, for the first time, on the margins of this year's general debate. The important outcome of the meeting provides a stronger and regular basis for high-level interaction, and the meeting allowed for an exchange of views on issues of mutual import and concern between PIF leaders and the Secretary-General.

This year's PIF meeting was hosted by the Cook Islands, and our communiqué gives proper focus to issues important to Tonga and the region, including sustainable development, climate change, the oceans, renewable energy and gender equality.

Tonga, like other small island developing States, returned to Rio de Janeiro in June to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to chart a new global course for sustainable development. For many, if not all, small island developing States, that return amounted to a reaffirmation of the special and particular vulnerabilities, recognized in 1992, that make States such as Tonga unique.

With other small island developing States, we are looking to advance, during this session of the General Assembly, the agreement reached in Rio on the holding in 2014 of a Third International Conference for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. That Conference should be hosted in the Pacific region.

Against the background of the recent Rio+20 and the ongoing efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), such a Conference would represent an early but timely moment for small island developing States to take stock of implemented outcomes. In order to be successful, the Conference will require the strong and active participation of all small island developing States and a strong, responsive and cohesive United Nations system attuned to the issues facing them.

Working towards such a Conference will provide a boost to ongoing national initiatives such as our Tonga strategic development framework and its priority objectives for 2011 to 2014.

Tonga joined other States members of the Alliance of Small Island States yesterday, under the chairmanship of Nauru, in adopting a declaration focused on the continuing serious threat posed by climate change to the territorial integrity, viability and survival of all small island States.

There is an urgent need to continue to address the security implications of climate change, including the impact on territorial integrity, the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters, the threat to water and food security, and the forced displacement of people.

Our challenge to the international community, and to developed countries in particular, is to take the bold measures necessary to reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases to levels that will ensure a viable and meaningful future for small island developing States such as Tonga. To safeguard the survival of the smallest and most vulnerable States among us is to safeguard a viable future for all States. A rising tide may lift all boats, but it will drown us all.

The coming meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Qatar must advance the efforts of last year's Durban Conference to bridge differences over key issues, such as those related to the future of the Kyoto Protocol, climate finance, closing the pre-2020 mitigation ambition gap and constructively addressing loss and damage associated with the impact of climate change, while bearing in mind the cost of adaptation in developing countries, such as Tonga.

This year's theme of the Pacific Islands Forum was "Large ocean island States — the Pacific challenge". It built upon the positive outcomes of Rio+20 with regard to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their marine environment, or what we call the blue economy. Like other Pacific neighbours, Tonga's connection to its oceanic environment has a strong historical dimension.

The ocean and its resources are more than an ancient pathway to a maritime and seafaring past among disparate islands. They potentially now represent a liquid highway to a more sustainable future for Pacific peoples. An eminent Tongan scholar, the late Mr. Epeli Hau'ofa, said:

> "We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands but by the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea. We are the ocean. Oceania is us."

As custodians of the ocean and its living and non-living resources, we have long appreciated that the health of the oceans is critical to maintaining a staple source of sustenance and livelihood for island communities.

We welcome the focus of Rio+20 on sustainable fisheries and national capacity development, the importance of access and the role of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and women, and the need for concerted action to address the vulnerability of coral reefs and mangroves.

As a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Tonga is actively seeking to implement its obligations under the Convention, including through the timely negotiation of maritime boundary delimitation agreements with neighbouring States; effective participation in the work of the International Seabed Authority and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf; implementation of related agreements, such as the 1995 Fish Stocks Agreement; and consideration of the potential development of further legal instruments, within the Convention's framework, to reflect the new realities.

During this International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, we welcome the Secretary-General's high-level event this week, which was dedicated in part to addressing the continued development of renewable energy sources. With like-minded members of the Alliance of Small Island States, Tonga will build on the Barbados Declaration on Achieving Sustainable Energy for All in Small Island Developing States and on Rio+20 to implement its voluntary commitment to reducing its greenhouse-gas emissions and to improving energy security through a 50 per cent renewable energy mix by 2020.

With the requisite financial resources, ongoing capacity-building, appropriate technology transfers and genuine partnership with dedicated development partners, such as New Zealand, Italy, Japan and the United Arab Emirates, national initiatives, like the Tonga Energy Road Map, will continue to develop and provide real benefit for Tongans. We are committed to a strong advocacy role on the Council of the International Renewable Energy Agency and to the critical work that it does in pursuing a more secure and sustainable energy path.

Tonga joined the other States members of the Pacific Islands Forum in adopting the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration as an important part of the Pacific Islands Forum communiqué this year. It establishes a valuable political platform for investing in the empowerment and promotion of women and young girls as a vital part of Tongan society and the region's future.

We thank Australia for its investment in the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development initiative. The steps taken to promote and protect the interests of Tongan women and gender equality include the extension of paid maternity leave, within the public service, from one to three months; Government approval of a draft law on violence against women and children, which is to be tabled during the parliamentary session; Government approval of holding nationwide consultations towards consensus on ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the launch of a national study on domestic violence against women; and, most recently, last week's launch of a social welfare scheme for the elderly, that is, those over 75 years of age.

Without genuine improvement in gender equality, Member States will continue to struggle to achieve real progress towards meeting their commitments under the MDGs and beyond.

In closing, on behalf of His Majesty King Tupou VI, Queen Nanasipau'u, the royal household, the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Tonga, I wish to convey our profound appreciation for the overwhelming messages of condolence and sympathy from Member States, the Secretary-General, the Secretariat and the General Assembly on the untimely passing earlier this year of our much-beloved King George Tupou V. I acknowledge in particular the assistance of the People's Republic of China at that time. Though his reign may have been brief, it may yet prove timeless in enabling an environment where Tongans now exercise greater electoral democracy and enjoy a fully elected Government and a more representative Parliament. That may be his reign's most enduring legacy.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga for the statement he has just made.

> *Lord Tu'ivakano of Nukunuku, Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Defence, Information and Communication of the Kingdom of Tonga, was escorted from the rostrum.*

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Guido Westerwelle, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Westerwelle (Germany) (*spoke in German; English text provided by the delegation*): Freedom, dignity, self-determination and the hope of a better life were the driving forces behind the movement for change in the Arab world.

As Germans, we know from our own bitter experience that freedom is not a gift. It has to be won and constantly defended. Freedom is more than just freedom of thought. It is freedom to express one's own opinion and to voice public criticism. For that reason alone, freedom is not always comfortable. The first article of the Basic Law, Germany's Constitution, states that human dignity shall be inviolable. That applies to every single individual, regardless of their origin, culture, creed or sex. As Germans, we have experienced what it is to lack freedom in the course of our own history. We will always stand by those who, wherever they are in the world, call for freedom of opinion, religion, the press and artistic freedom.

Freedom has a daughter; it is tolerance. And freedom has a son; it is respect, respect for other people, respect for what is important to others, respect for what is sacred to others. Freedom therefore does not mean freedom from responsibility. Freedom always means freedom to shoulder responsibility.

We understand the many devout people who feel wounded by the recent shameful anti-Islam video. However, legitimate criticism and sincere indignation cannot be used to justify acts of violence or destruction. Some would have us believe that the burning of embassy buildings are proof of a clash of civilizations. We must not allow ourselves to be deluded by such arguments. The vast majority of people oppose violence. The people who have taken to the streets, as well as their political representatives gathered here in New York this week, have expressed that forcefully. It is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash within societies and civilizations. It is also a struggle for the soul of the movement for change in the Arab world.

It is a struggle between open and closed minds, between moderates and radicals, between understanding and hate. It is a clash between those seeking peace and those prepared to resort to violence. The extremists want to prevent the emergence of freedom by inciting violence. They must not be allowed to succeed.

Germany has taken a stand in that struggle. We will continue to expand our support for people in the Arab world. We are not going to turn our backs on them, but we will be open to them. Our values and our interests compel us to take the side of those around the world who are fighting peacefully for freedom, dignity and self-determination. Education and work, investment and growth — our offer of a transformational partnership still stands.

I will never forget the Syrian father who held out his emaciated son to me during my visit to the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. Such suffering renders us speechless, but it also impels us to act. To this very day, the Security Council has failed to live up to its responsibility for the people in Syria. I express that criticism with great sadness. The deadlock in the Security Council must not continue. Every day, the violence perpetrated by the Bashar Al-Assad regime is escalating. The risk of a conflagration engulfing the entire region is growing. Together with our partners and the United Nations, we are helping the many refugees in Syria itself and in neighbouring countries.

All Syrians who want their country to have a democratic and pluralistic future based on the rule of law must work together. We support the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, to find a political approach. Despite the escalating violence and despite the deadlock in the Security Council, we must not stop working on a political solution.

During the past 20 months, the Arab League has demonstrated ever more clearly its adherence to the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We welcome that and we want to build on it. At Germany's initiative, during the last week in September, the Security Council welcomed intensifying cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States (see S/PRST/2012/20). That is an acknowledgement of the Arab League's constructive and positive role.

We also pay tribute to the efforts to gain freedom in other parts of the world. As a result of the remarkable opening-up process under way in Myanmar, the country is emerging from isolation and gradually leaving repression behind.

We criticize and strongly condemn the ongoing repression in our own neighbourhood, in Belarus.

In many other Asian and African countries, which have struck out in a new direction, we are supporting political transformation by providing assistance for economic and social development. That is in the common interest of the international community. For there is one thing that becomes ever more apparent, and that is that without development, there can be no security and without security there can be no development. That applies to our engagement in Afghanistan, which we will continue after the withdrawal of combat troops in 2014. It also applies to the efforts to bring stability to Somalia and Yemen, to the Great Lakes region and to the countries of the Sahel.

We are very concerned by the still-unresolved dispute about Iran's nuclear programme. Iran has still not produced evidence of the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. It has also failed to date to provide the transparency that the International Atomic Energy Agency has long demanded. So far, the talks during the last few months have not made enough progress towards reaching a solution. The European Union's three plus three group has put forward proposals for a substantive negotiation process. We still await a serious response from Iran. We want a political and diplomatic solution. Time is short. Israel's security is at stake. Indeed, stability in the entire region is at stake. However, that is also about averting the risk of a nuclear arms race with unforeseeable consequences for international security. I call on Iran to stop playing for time. The situation is serious indeed, and time is running out. We want a political solution, and we are putting all our efforts into achieving that goal.

Those challenges must not lead us to lose sight of the necessity of a negotiated peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. There is a danger that the goal of a two-State solution, the only solution that can reconcile the legitimate interests of the two sides, will slip away. The two sides must build new trust. At the same time, they must refrain from doing anything that might jeopardize a two-State solution.

Germany's foreign policy is a policy for peace. Germany's foreign policy is anchored in Europe. Many have been wondering whether Europe can successfully manage its sovereign debt crisis and whether it will continue to play a leading role in the world. The answer is an emphatic yes. Europe has a great responsibility in the world. And Germany is aware of its responsibility for Europe. The way out of the debt crisis is difficult. It requires spending discipline, solidarity and growth. We will continue down that road. Europe is growing closer together. Europe is consolidating. Europe will emerge from the crisis stronger than ever before. Europe will remain a force to be reckoned with as the world's largest donor of development assistance, as an inspiration for peaceful regional cooperation, as a pioneer in climate action and disarmament, as a champion of rules-based globalization and as a driving force for United Nations reform.

My country's peaceful unification more than 20 years ago also signified the reunification of Europe. Since then, the world has changed dramatically. Today, we find ourselves on the threshold of a multipolar world. The world with its interdependencies needs a cooperative order. It needs strong and representative institutions. We will weaken the Security Council if we fail to adapt it to today's world. Together with our partners in the G-4 group, India, Brazil and Japan, Germany is prepared to assume greater responsibility.

It cannot be that Latin America and Africa have no permanent seats on the Security Council or that dynamic Asia has only one. That does not reflect the realities of today's world, and it definitely does not reflect the realities of tomorrow.

The challenges are too great for us to simply accept the status quo. The world is not only growing together; the pace of change is increasing. We are living in an age of breathtaking change. That change brings with it risks and new dangers, as well as new uncertainties. Above all, however, that change brings with it great opportunities, especially for young people. In this changing world we need a clear compass, and our compass is freedom. The yearning for freedom is rooted in people's hearts all over the world. They are our partners in building a better future.

Address by Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa.

Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa): Samoa commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence this year, at home and abroad. The Headquarters of the United Nations was one of the venues, and for good reason. Our aspirations to be a sovereign State founded on democratic principles, Christian beliefs and our cultural values were ably facilitated by the United Nations. New Zealand, as the administering Power, was sympathetic and supportive, which hastened the attainment of our independence. Our people were given the choice to decide the future of our country. The United Nations and the administering Power supported the process and paved the way. As we also heard from the President of the United States, people everywhere must ultimately long for the freedom to determine their destiny.

Half a century later, there still remain territories today, even in our Pacific region, where people have not been able to exercise their right to self-determination. In the case of French Polynesia, we encourage the metropolitan Power and the territory's leadership, with the support of the United Nations, to find an amicable way to exercise the right of the people of the territory to determine their future.

The outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (resolution 66/288, annex) provides a blueprint for the future we want. It is a future we all signed on to, a partnership of shared responsibilities, commitments and undertakings among all Members, big and small. For all the goals to be achieved, every country must deliver on its pledges in good faith and not try to negotiate a way out.

For Samoa, the gains include the reaffirmation that small island developing States (SIDS) are a special case in the area of sustainable development, owing to their unique and particular vulnerabilities. But acknowledging the vulnerabilities of SIDS without the attendant resources for strengthening their resilience makes that achievement only a hollow victory. The oceans and seas are resources that most members of our group have access to. The call to conserve and harness the marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions, including taking a decision on developing an international instrument under the Convention on the Law of the Sea, is a major achievement, worthy of support.

The decision to hold a SIDS review meeting in 2014 is important and timely. Samoa's offer to host that meeting is a matter of record. Coincidentally, 2014 holds special significance for our country. Barring any natural catastrophes, we will graduate from the category of least-developed countries (LDCs) on 1 January of that year. That was one of the motives for our bid to host the SIDS review meeting. We want to underscore that, through genuine partnerships with development partners, our small island developing State, which is also an LDC, has been able to markedly raise our country's socioeconomic situation and our people's standard of living. It is important that every Member State be afforded the opportunity to host United Nations meetings, and the success of meetings should be measured on the quality of the decisions and commitments agreed to, not merely on considerations of costs and numbers of participants.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are not merely aspirations of what might be, but tangible outcomes of what should be. By their very nature, they are a restatement of our peoples' development needs and hopes. Thus for us, the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 is not just a matter of pride but one of necessity, and we will continue to do everything possible to bring about the desired result. Success would also mean that we would start the post-2015 sustainable development goals framework at higher thresholds, which would help spur greater effort to improve the lives of more and more of our people.

The sustainable development goals that will succeed the MDGs are already a major focus of attention in some quarters. From Samoa's perspective, clear, time-bound, targeted and measurable global benchmarks are critical. We must ensure that the post-2015 development agenda builds on the important progress made in the MDG process and is expanded to cover broader sustainable development issues, as agreed on in Rio. We must also ensure that the important priorities identified in the outcomes of the 2014 SIDS meeting are integrated into the post-2015 global development frameworks and comprehensively addressed in order to respond to the needs of SIDS.

Climate change is the world's most urgent problem, requiring a decisive global response. It is a challenge that should unite and not divide us. Entrenched positions that ignore today's realities and pursue unrelated agendas have no role in our collective effort. All countries are affected to varying degrees by climate change. No one should be detached or unconcerned about our common plight. We must work together, with a sense of urgency and commitment, to address climate change — today, not tomorrow. It should not be only science that recommends what we should do, but also our consciences and the political will to follow through. We clearly want leaders who view the world as a single constituency where everyone works together within the limits of their capacity and capability to be part of the total solution.

Mr. Schaper (Netherlands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The climate change negotiating process has been a long and frustrating journey, especially for small island developing States, which contribute the least to the causes of climate change yet stand to suffer the most, and are least able to effectively adapt to its adverse impacts. Climate change cannot be wished away. Even those countries that have been in denial to date must surely now accept the weight of scientific evidence. Climate change, facilitated largely through human activity, poses one of the gravest threats to humankind and to the continuation of life in our world as we know it today.

Samoa's unwavering support for United Nations peacekeeping work is underscored by its 12 years of uninterrupted police deployment in service of missions in Liberia, the Sudan, Timor-Leste and South Sudan. Our commitment is rooted in our firm belief in the role that United Nations peacekeeping plays in helping to eliminate the causes of conflict and in bringing about peace and stability. A peaceful environment helps to improve the lives of those who have been affected by conflict and, ultimately, to achieve our common goal of peaceful coexistence for our peoples and nations.

We are determined to gradually increase over time the level and number of our officers in peacekeeping duties. Regionally owned and coordinated solutions to regional upheavals can be quite effective and successful. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, under the umbrella of the Pacific Islands Forum, demonstrates the effectiveness of that approach very well, and Samoa will continue to provide strong support to regionally owned solutions when required.

Samoa reaffirms its unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms. Our continuing determination to work with other Member States to fight terrorism using all possible means is consistent with human rights and the rule of law. The horror of terrorist atrocities is a common and almost daily occurrence. Terrorist acts committed under whatever pretext or purpose are deplorable and morally unjustified. In its various forms and manifestations, terrorism is responsible for the permanent scars of horror and fear that have gripped international attention in recent years. Those attacks have underlined the fact that when terrorists are able to infiltrate national borders, no peoples or countries will ever be immune to the threat of terrorist violence.

So many innocent lives have been lost indiscriminately and unceremoniously. More than ever, terrorism is a major threat that must be confronted by a collective international response at the national, regional and international levels. It must be condemned in the strongest terms possible in order to send out an unequivocal message that it is neither accepted nor condoned and that perpetrators should not expect any sympathy for their actions. The tragic events in Benghazi recall and underscore the importance of all nations working together, including through the United Nations, to implement practical and effective measures to provide for the protection, security and safety of diplomatic and consular missions and representatives worldwide. Samoa will continue to work with like-minded countries towards that goal.

Samoa's membership of the United Nations is grounded on the promise of the hope, equality and justice that the United Nations offers its Member States, irrespective of their economic, political or military strength. States in leadership positions and those aspiring to that status must lead responsibly and by example. Every Member State, irrespective of its size or strength, should be able to contribute appropriately to decisions and actions of the United Nations in order to make our Organization an agent of change during challenging times. The United Nations continues to play an important role in our collective effort to achieve its objectives, whether in the areas of peace and security, the environment, poverty alleviation, the fight against terrorism and many other challenges that threaten our world.

This week, at the treaty event, I deposited Samoa's instrument of ratification for the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We ratified those amendments because we place great faith in the rule of law and the vital protection that the law offers to all States, especially to the weak and small.

Lately, serious disputes have arisen among bordering States, with the potential to escalate into confrontation with far-reaching consequences. We would encourage the parties concerned to resolve their differences through appropriate peaceful settlement arrangements.

Clearly, Member States can do only so much. We need a committed Secretariat that is aware and sensitive to the needs of the peoples it exists to serve. That is why Samoa supports the Secretary-General's vision to create a flexible and mobile professional career service to allow for quick and positive responses to the diverse demands of Member States. The need for the United Nations to deliver as one entity cannot be overemphasized. It adds value and quality to the process, eliminates waste, minimizes duplication, and ensures that the scarce resources entrusted to its care are used optimally to supplement Member States' hard-earned contributions.

The United Nations remains the only viable institution that draws all the nations of our world together. The need to revitalize the General Assembly and reform the Security Council has been obvious for many years. In the case of the Security Council, as long as its composition and rules ignore today's global realities, it will continue to struggle for legitimacy and strain to effectively carry out its intended tasks, as has been witnessed over many years.

Samoa remains firm in its position that the permanent and non-permanent membership categories of the Security Council should be expanded. Member States with appropriate credentials and the disposition to contribute to the Council's work and resources should be encouraged to apply for membership of that important organ of our Organization. Importantly, the intergovernmental process should continue in earnest during the current session to bring finality to an issue that has taxed Member States' patience and endurance for over a decade and a half.

If the United Nations is to be truly reformed, we also need a strengthened and revitalized General Assembly as the primary policy and decision-making organ of the Organization. Moreover, we encourage the efforts under way to streamline the work of the different United Nations agencies to eliminate the wasting of resources and unnecessary duplication of time and effort.

We often congregate around points of commonality, finding legitimacy and safety in numbers. It is diversity, however, that has historically ensured human adaptability, resilience and true dynamism. Our own Pacific region is going through a process of maturity, where subregionalism is evolving and the uniqueness of capacity and comparative advantages are coming to the fore. The same can be said of our United Nations family and its dynamic leadership. Diversity can create a platform for collective progress if, in the words of President Obama, "we ensure that we are strengthened by our differences, not defined by them".

As we heard from other leaders, including the Secretary-General and the President of the United States, it is of critical importance that the Palestinians be allowed to realize their right to a viable State of their own, existing alongside a secure and safe Jewish State of Israel. That has also been and continues to be Samoa's long-standing position on the issue. We remain hopeful that current efforts to secure a peaceful, durable and fair settlement in the Middle East will be successful. All efforts towards that goal rekindle hope and should be supported. A peace deal is central to providing conditions conducive to the achievement of a two-State solution.

We wish the President well as he leads the work of our General Assembly. We also wish to place on record our appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the leadership he brings to the work of our Organization, and to wish him success in the discharge of his key responsibilities in the challenging times ahead.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Mr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Douglas (Saint Kitts and Nevis): On behalf of the Government and people of Saint Kitts and Nevis, I extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election to the presidency of General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. His task, we know, will be far from easy in the light of the wide range of taxing issues that will be brought before him. As he embarks on his tenure, it is our hope that under his astute leadership, the myriad issues that define the work of the Assembly will continue to find relevance for all of us.

It is imperative, therefore, that the mobilization of commitments required to advance the agenda of this sixty-seventh session begin now. We are aware that the challenges associated with that task are demanding and will indeed require our focused attention, strong partnership and visionary leadership if we are to make significant strides in an era embattled by a plethora of issues that threaten the realization of our various development goals. We have no doubt that he will provide the degree of attention they so urgently deserve.

I must also at this point, on behalf of my delegation, thank Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, for so ably presiding over the work of the Assembly during the past year.

Our focus this year is on continuing to steadfastly promote an environment of peace and security, which are the critical requirements for sustainable development for our peoples. As the geographic distance that divides us shrinks into insignificance and becomes increasingly reduced by our interdependence and partnership, it is equally significant that we strive for the effective and lasting settlement of disputes.

Libya and Syria, of course, are just two of the many cases that come to mind, with the myriad and multifaceted questions that they raise, not only regarding the advisability of intervention, but also with reference to such issues as the timing of any intervention, the form of any intervention and, of course, the associated humanitarian and relief-related consequences of any such intervention. The complexity of those challenges demands a sober redoubling of our efforts and underscores the fact that social upheaval and human trauma anywhere must indeed concern us all.

The Security Council must continue to ensure that it executes its mandate to enable the institutionalization of a culture of peace and security. Respect for democracy and the democratic principles espoused by the United Nations must inform the thrust of our engagement as we reject intolerance for diversity and embrace peaceful coexistence for all people. I take this opportunity to condemn the recent, senseless attack on the United States consulate in Libya, which resulted in the loss of innocent lives. It must be condemned from the highest level.

Saint Kitts and Nevis is grateful to be a stable, socially cohesive nation. On behalf of my Government, I would also like to express our deep appreciation to the United States of America for its highly valued support, in the form of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, offered to both my country and our Caribbean region in our fight against drugs and criminality. It also addresses the issue of the reform that is required to ensure that our youth embrace renewed alternatives to lives of unproductivity and look towards a new hope for peace and prosperity through respect for human life. That is of great importance to us. The continuing flow of foreign-made small arms into our Caribbean region, however, concerns us greatly. Originating beyond our shores, those weapons have dire consequences in terms both of human life and of the economic stability of our nations.

We are aware that changing cultural values are influencing the use of weapons by some in our nations, and we understand the importance of focused and effective policing and partnership on matters of security. In that regard, we urge the international community to make the production of a much-needed and long-overdue arms trade treaty an absolute priority. The interests of democratic nations everywhere cry out for the establishment of international standards and controls governing the illicit flow of conventional weapons, and I urge the establishment of a dedicated secretariat to assist States parties in that regard.

I ask: How can small Caribbean nations be expected to deal single-handed with the double misfortune of being located between regions of massive drug production and regions of massive drug consumption? Small arms and light weapons always follow illegal drugs, and we in the Caribbean are simply not equipped to deal with the externally created crime fallout. On that point, I wish to stress that before its closure, the Barbados branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provided critical, hands-on collaboration in this high-priority area of fighting crime. With its presence now having been withdrawn, the vital support that we need simply is not there, leaving us to adjust as best we can at precisely the time when drug- and deportee-related crimes continue to be a major hemispheric challenge.

While we focus on the well-being of our people, my Government has strengthened its primary health care with increased attention to reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and has updated an implementable plan of action that addresses the priorities in keeping with the Political Declaration on NCDs (resolution 66/2, annex). As part of our national sensitization mechanism on health-related issues, we are institutionalizing a culture of wellness with emphasis on healthy lifestyles. Similar responses have been initiated at the regional level, as we encourage Member States to participate effectively in the multilateral institutions to voice our positions on the issue of NCDs. That is why the Caribbean Community has taken the lead on this matter in recent years, with the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases.

Therefore, in the light of the clear nexus between a healthy workforce and a nation's economic potential, I urge this body today to move forward to launch a United Nations campaign to curb the global toll of NCDs as we move towards the realization of our Millennium Development Goals. At the time of last year's High-level Meeting on NCDs, there was a commitment both to ensuring that this grave issue remains high on the development agenda and to ensuring concrete action in that regard. Hence, the type of global effort previously recommended would constitute precisely the type of concrete action to which we committed ourselves one year ago.

Any discussion of global health must address the issue of HIV/AIDS, and because our ultimate objective must be the complete eradication of that dreaded disease — as opposed to the lifelong management and accommodation of same by millions of people around the globe — I appeal today for a wise, determined and discerning onslaught against the scourge at the local, national, and international levels by us all. Here and now, we must recommit ourselves to eradicating the stigmatization of and discrimination against people living or associated with HIV/AIDS. The abuses of human lives that perpetuate discrimination and stigmatization must come to an end. We in the Caribbean are committed to achieving exactly that.

I wish now to address a matter that is profoundly troubling to small island States like mine. Whatever the debate being waged internationally regarding the question of climate change, and however dramatic the rhetorical jousting within various circles on the issue, we in the Caribbean can attest to the radical climatic shifts that our region has undergone in recent decades. Moreover, it is very troubling that the largest contributors of greenhouse gases are still not taking responsibility for the increasing temperatures, rising sea levels, coastal degradation, coral reef bleaching and decimation, infrastructural damage and loss of lives that their actions have wrought.

Our peoples, our maritime integrity, our soils and our infrastructure are all interrelated contributors to our overall social and economic viability. And the absence of corrective and restitutional action on the part of the industrialized nations involved is neither constructive nor understandable in this highly interdependent world. The physical, mental and financial burdens that other countries' energy usage has inflicted on countries like mine has been enormous, plunging us deeper into debt and severely frustrating our efforts to meet our Millennium Development Goals.

While a shift to renewable energy will not instantly solve the myriad problems caused by a significantly fossil fuel-based global economy, the embrace of green energy will indeed help to halt the intense downward spiral into which our fossil fuel-based economies have thrust our planet. And so we strongly urge that green energy be made an absolute priority globally. I must commend the Secretary-General for his visionary leadership and the Governments and financial institutions that have committed generously to ensuring that high-impact clean energy is utilized globally.

My Government wishes to place on record its appreciation to the Government of the Republic of China on Taiwan and other development partners for their valuable assistance to my country in the area of renewable energy, which will positively impact our energy cost-reduction efforts as we move towards realizing a full green economy by 2015 in order to bring much-needed financial relief to our people.

The recently held United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) set the stage for a reconfiguration of the global programme on sustainable development, and signaled a new era in the sustainable development agenda of the international community. Two decades of debate and deliberation were instrumental in our being able to frame the dialogue, and envision a path for the two decades ahead of us. If we are to even approach the potential of Rio+20, it will be essential that we first face up to, and then break, the strictures of indifference and narrow self-interest that have plagued us for far too long. It is therefore incumbent upon us and future generations to view our responsibilities as parts of an ongoing continuum, with each of our efforts benefitting from and building upon the work that came before.

Saint Kitts and Nevis therefore applauds the decision to convene the third United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 2014. Small island developing States, by virtue of our size and geographic profile, are clearly among the world's most vulnerable nations — hence the recognition of our need for special attention where sustainable development is concerned and the importance of everyone remembering the absolutely essential nature of special and differentiated responsibilities where small island States are concerned.

I therefore urge that clear targets be established now so that we can all prepare thoroughly and well for the 2014 Conference, at which urgently needed attention will be paid to the ways in which our own vulnerabilities as small developing States might best be reduced. This body can be assured of our full participation in the process and in the post-Rio+20 sustainable development agenda.

Permit me to point out, however, the extent to which the best-laid plans of countries like mine are repeatedly upended by decisions made in nations far beyond our shores. I mentioned earlier the impact of externally generated carbon emissions on our economic prospects. I also discussed the severe national security threat posed to our region by foreign-made small arms and weapons that have been finding their way into our nations. Particularly trying as well, and very troublingly and destabilizing for many countries throughout the region — and indeed the world at large — has been the global economic crisis that made itself manifest in 2008, the ramifications of which have been trying and testing regional economic planners to the limits ever since. In no way of our making, that global economic crisis has severely complicated the task of governance in advanced economies and more so in highly indebted middle-income nations like mine. It has introduced both new variables and additional unknowns to our economic planning models, and has, in a nutshell, thrust upon us a backdrop of global volatility that none of us could have anticipated, that none of us welcome, and that has created immense difficulties for all of our people.

Indeed, Saint Kitts and Nevis was forced to pursue a new economic development programme involving fiscal balance and debt restructuring, with built-in social safety nets. The assistance of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union and our many local, regional and international creditors, including the United Kingdom and the United States, as members of the Paris Club, have helped us to alleviate the severity of the social impact of the economic adjustment and to restore confidence among our investors in the economy of Saint Kitts and Nevis. But we continue to face significant challenges, especially in relation to the attainment of economic growth in the context of a very sluggish and uncertain global economy. The mammoth challenges and difficulties that our small multi-island State faces underscore the need to pay greater attention to the issue of special and differentiated responsibilities in a rather trying era. It also underscores the need for small, responsible nations like mine to have fair and calm paths to redress in our relations with far larger and infinitely more powerful friends and allies.

A few days ago in this very Assembly, the nations of the world held the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels. While there is often debate as to the exact meaning of the rule of law, my delegation and the people we represent are happy to align ourselves with the core principle on the rule of law, as distilled by the late Mr. Thomas Bingham, Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales. In his book *The Rule of Law*, he stated:

> "The core of the existing principle is, I suggest, that all persons and authorities within the state, whether public or private, should be bound by and entitled to the benefit of laws publicly made, taking effect (generally) in the future and publicly administered in the courts."

Although not comprehensive, in my country's view that represents a solid basis from which to identify the essential elements of a continually evolving concept and an essential mechanism for conflict resolution and for ensuring respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of our people. I support the call of the Secretary-General for a comprehensive approach to strengthening the rule of law at the international and domestic levels.

I make the point because, over our almost 30 years of nationhood, Saint Kitts and Nevis has studiously examined both trends here at the United Nations and developments throughout the international community as we have evaluated our place in the world. Throughout that time, we have been faithfully guided by our belief in the rule of law. We believe that in the international arena, the rule of law was created to protect the vulnerable, like ours, and to remind us of obligations to our fellow human beings. We further believe that orderly and constructive coexistence requires not only citizens, but nations as well to be bound by the rule of law. Respect for international law has therefore, for our nation, always been our guiding force. My delegation calls on all States members of this great body to similarly respect that most sacred pillar of international coexistence.

Throughout the 29 years of our existence as a sovereign nation, the Republic of China on Taiwan has been a highly valued partner and ally. Throughout my nation, evidence of our collaborative efforts abound in areas as diverse as agriculture, agritourism, green energy, information technology, community development and education, to name just a few.

In my own nation or even my region, however, Taiwan's unfailing and valued contributions to the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the World Health Assembly and other forums have long demonstrated its outstanding credentials as a valued and impactful member of the global community. It is only fitting and just that all remaining strictures pertaining to Taiwan's standing among the international community of nations be removed. Saint Kitts and Nevis appeals to this body to ensure that that will indeed be done.

In closing, I wish to stress here how unfortunate it is that, yet again, the case has to be made for the lifting of the embargo on Cuba. The embargo is not, as some may wish to suggest, a matter of merely bilateral import. Not only have we repeatedly heard Cuba oppose the situation in this very body, but we also know that the embargo's continued denial of certain medical treatments to the Cuban people is simply unconscionable. Cuba and its people have made considerable contributions to international medicine and higher education, and the Caribbean has been among its most sustained beneficiaries. It is therefore with the utmost conviction and clearest possible resolve that Saint Kitts and Nevis calls for the immediate end to the embargo.

I recall that it was in July and August of this year that the international community participated in the games of the thirtieth Olympiad. At a time of rising international tensions and intensifying antagonisms, the time has probably come for us to introduce to other areas of international and intra-State realms of interaction the keen spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that has enabled the Olympics to function so constructively and so well for so many years.

The international community is, by definition, diverse. Throughout the community, however, there run strong seams of commonality that can and must be better utilized in order to promote peace, the constructive airing of differences and the avoidance of violent conflict. Most importantly, when all else fails, we can and must settle the most vexing international crises through the good offices of this institution, our United Nations. That is the path that would serve all our best interests. I sincerely urge that we take it.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of Saint Kitts and Nevis, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Meltek Sato Kilman Livtunvanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu.

Mr. Meltek Sato Kilman Livtunvanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Meltek Sato Kilman Livtunvanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Kilman (Vanuatu): Vanuatu wishes to associate itself with other delegations in congratulating the President and the members of his Bureau on their election to lead us through this sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. I am indeed profoundly delighted, as Mr. Jeremić assured us in our meeting earlier this week, that he will do his utmost to assist with and bring to the forefront the issues that confront the Pacific island States and other marginalized nations. We trust that with his guidance, this session will conclude with successful outcomes.

Allow me also to pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, who, with strong leadership and diplomatic finesse, led us to great outcomes during the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly.

Our world has seen unprecedented disputes and conflicts, most of which have spanned successive generations. The theme of the sixty-seventh session, "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means", should therefore lead us to focus on finding lasting solutions to the numerous ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world that are causing vulnerable people to suffer. Members have the solemn responsibility to steer this multilateral gathering towards deeper consideration of the founding goals of the Organization, which are to encourage and create a more secure and peaceful world in which diverse cultures and civilizations can coexist without having to resort to force and violence to achieve their goals.

This rostrum can testify to all the speeches that have been delivered by the world's great leaders on a vast array of issues that affect humankind. Many of us representing politically independent nations here have shared the journey and the litany of heartaches and dreams deferred of many of our global citizens, whose human rights to larger political and civil freedom are still bound by the tentacles of imperialism and the legacy of colonialism. Even now, for the remaining colonized territories, this rostrum represents the pinnacle they so greatly aspire to reach one day. Since 1980, the Republic of Vanuatu has repeatedly called for the United Nations to strengthen its efforts towards achieving the full decolonization of territories still controlled by administrative Powers. I call on the independent, free nations of the world to complete the story of decolonization and to close that chapter.

At this juncture, I urge the United Nations not to reject the demands for French Polynesia's right to self-determination and progress. In the same manner, negotiations for the self-government of the indigenous people of New Caledonia must continue. We encourage the parties to ensure that the process towards achieving self-government will stay on track.

I also call upon Members to ensure that collective action is taken to lift the embargo on Cuba. We, the Members of the United Nations, must revive our political motivation and courage, dispel our feelings of animosity, and ensure that United Nations resolutions on that issue are fully implemented. Our actions must not detract from the universal values of love and respect for people, no matter how insignificant they may be to the powerful nations. I hope that one day we will at last be able to echo the message of freedom to many of our friends who still suffer from the burden of conflicting ideologies.

Last year, I reiterated to this Assembly our serious concerns over the denial of a country's right to exercise its full political freedom and inherent cultural rights over its maritime territories. Since we gained our independence 32 years ago, our territorial dispute with the French Republic over the southern two islands of Vanuatu, Matthew and Hunter, has been a reminder that we must continue to uphold the notion that the rule of law should not be used by powerful nations as an instrument to coerce weak and small nations, especially in territorial disputes.

The French and the Vanuatu Governments met in Paris in April to commence dialogue on the issue of the territorially disputed islands. We take this opportunity to thank the French Government for finally opening its door to dialogue and negotiation in an attempt to resolve that outstanding international dispute. We acknowledge the procedures outlined within the United Nations to ensure that such disputes are amicably resolved.

As a small island State surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean, Vanuatu is exposed to the notorious illegal transshipment of and trade in illicit arms. The international arms trade has continuously lacked proper and coherent regulation and is responsible for the loss of innumerable lives. Like many other countries, we call on the United Nations to take a much firmer approach in expediting the conclusion of an arms trade treaty, which would provide greater security and control over such illegal activity. That is an issue of paramount importance to all countries exposed to the illegal trade in arms and light weapons.

My country has consistently argued that the mechanisms and criteria for assessing graduation eligibility must not be isolated from the permanent and inherent vulnerabilities of our countries. It is unrealistic for United Nations agencies to assess progress and make projections without taking into consideration the matter of permanent vulnerabilities and the capacity to sustain growth in our countries after graduation. I wish to further state that, according to the *World Risk Report 2011*, Vanuatu scored highest on the World Risk Index as the country with the greatest disaster risk, due to its high exposure and weak coping capacities. The findings of that report are critical, and we therefore ask that the United Nations Committee for Development Policy carefully weigh its arguments and reassess the vulnerability graduation criteria.

I would also like to state that, prior to another triennial review of the least developed country (LDC) category, the United Nations will need to ensure that proper resolutions are adopted by the General Assembly to ensure that small island States graduating from LDC status continue to enjoy certain preferential treatment, even after graduation, to offset the vulnerability factor. Let me take this opportunity to invite the members of the triennial review to visit my country to establish first-hand information and ascertain the findings of the *World Risk Report* prior to escalating the process of graduation in 2013.

Our own experience has shown that the different ways that multilateral organizations and institutions categorize member countries can affect the flow of development assistance. For instance, Vanuatu, together with 15 other countries, was selected several years ago from among the Pacific island countries to benefit from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) funding of the Government of the United States of America. At the time of our selection, Vanuatu was graded as a low-income country and, by the eligibility criteria of the MCC, was automatically qualified for and benefited from $66 million to build two major national roads on two different islands in the country. I wish to express our appreciation to the United States Government for its assistance.

However, when the *Report on Countries that are Candidates for Millennium Challenge Corporation Account Eligibility for Fiscal Year 2010* was released, Vanuatu failed to qualify. The reason was simply that the MCC was using World Bank criteria and graduated Vanuatu from the status of low-income country to that of low-middle-income country. In other words, the World Bank's criteria may be totally different from the LDC criteria defined by the United Nations. I therefore wish to call on the United Nations, especially the Economic and Social Council, to ensure that the LDC definition and criteria used by United Nations agencies are compatible with those of the international financial institutions.

The vast Pacific Ocean is our heritage and the prime means of livelihood of the people living in its island countries. Like other Pacific Island countries, Vanuatu continues to be exposed to and threatened by the negative impacts of climate change, such as coastal erosion, coral bleaching and ocean acidification. At the Forty-Third Pacific Islands Forum in the Cook Islands, the Forum leaders noted that many challenges remain in realizing benefits from the pledged new and additional targets of the Copenhagen Accord. In that respect, I would like to seize this opportunity to express our wish for United Nations assistance in facilitating effective responses to global climate change, particularly through the prompt implementation of adaptation measures, as well as mitigation efforts, climate change financing, capacity-building and international negotiations.

While we tend to direct our main focus of attention towards global climate change, we must address other matters, such as environmental pollution, with the same exigency and rigor. The potential for permanent, irrevocable damage to the environment by marine pollution has been constantly highlighted by the scientific community and should not be tolerated. The future growth of international maritime traffic will further exacerbate the situation. Vanuatu urges all remaining States that have not yet done so to expeditiously sign and ratify the 1972 London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter, as well as the 1996 Protocol thereto, and to promulgate and enforce legal regimes, both in the domestic and international arenas.

At this point, I would like to reiterate the unnecessary risk to which we expose our children and ourselves by not taking a firm precautionary approach with regard to marine geoengineering practices, such as sub-seabed carbon sequestration and ocean fertilization. In our global efforts to combat climate change, the strict promotion of and adherence to only those responses that are environmentally sensible is our crucial responsibility, and I am not only speaking on behalf of a small island nation when I recall that, by forgetting the essentiality of the oceans as the very foundation of life on Earth, one neglects a vital guarantor of mankind's future survival.

As I conclude this speech, I have to make a last appeal to all assembled leaders. I urge them to take immediate action upon their return to their home countries to initiate the change that needs to come about if we wish to preserve a planet capable of providing our sons and daughters with a bright future. If the leaders of the industrialized countries want to achieve the proposed 1.5° C target, they have less than eight years left to close a vast mitigation gap. Who if not they can or will implement the required measures for that crucial change? This may well be their last chance. In their hands lie the hope and destiny of the world's nations. It is a responsibility that they must assume not only for their own people, but for humankind as a whole.

I am grateful for the opportunity to express my views in this forum. Long live our aspirations to create a better and a more secure world for everyone, and may God bless the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Meltek Sato Kilman Livtunvanu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on Ms. Antonella Mularoni, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Telecommunications and Transportation of the Republic of San Marino.

Ms. Mularoni (San Marino): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino, I congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, and I wish him a fruitful year. The San Marino delegation assures him of its utmost cooperation in all the work of the General Assembly. I also express my country's gratitude to the outgoing President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for the excellent work carried out during the sixty-sixth session. He distinguished himself by his leadership in the difficult and complex issues before the United Nations. He promoted the most important themes on the General Assembly's agenda with courage and determination, laying foundations for solutions based on the widest possible consensus, while continually working to strengthen the global governance architecture.

My country also extends special thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his energy and extraordinary determination in leading the United Nations. San Marino supports the basic priorities of the Secretary-General's political action and his idea that the United Nations should play a key role in strengthening global governance by creating new cooperation models capable of managing today's challenges and the ever-increasing calls for change. The Organization is in a unique position to provide solutions in deeply interconnected fields, such as development, peace and security, human rights and humanitarian action.

San Marino appreciates the focus of the Secretary-General's attention on all United Nations Member States, without distinction, as well as his commitment in the field of reform and his presence in all international politically relevant and emergency situations. Among those worth underlining is the Secretary-General's tireless commitment to finding a solution to the terrible Syrian conflict.

I thank the President for the theme chosen for this session: "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". The Republic of San Marino strongly believes in the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. My country has always believed in the power of dialogue, democracy and respect for others as values at the basis of peaceful coexistence among peoples.

In that respect, with reference to the recent bloody attacks on Western diplomatic missions, San Marino intends to voice once more its firm condemnation of any form of violence. We do not believe that violence is the right answer when someone feels hurt in his personal beliefs or opinions, regardless of the gravity of the statements made. Human life must always be above everything and everyone. Those actions are even more reproachable when directed to institutions that are the emblems of international collaboration and mutual assistance and when States bear no responsibility for the statements made.

Our country is therefore grateful to the President for having chosen the theme, most of all at a time when the international scene is unfortunately characterized by ever-increasing and bloody conflicts. In that context, the role of the United Nations, and in particular of the General Assembly, in peaceful transitions and democratic solutions is even more fundamental.

For that reason and because the international community is now called upon to face major global challenges in a consistent and rapid manner, the reform process of the United Nations is crucial to future world stability and must remain the target of all our efforts. We have the duty to guarantee the full effectiveness of the Organization's activities with a view to preserving and strengthening its essential value as a point of reference for the international community and for any individual.

I have the pleasure to reiterate again this year the support granted by San Marino to the revitalization process of the General Assembly. In that regard, I thank Georgia and the Gambia, as co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly, for the report recently adopted (A/66/891), which is the outcome of considerable effort and numerous informal meetings with Member States and the representatives of the various political groups. That reform is particularly important for my country, since the General Assembly is the most democratic body of the United Nations and, as such, the most adequate and sometimes the only forum where a small State can express its opinions.

The revitalization process of the General Assembly is fundamental to strengthening the global governance architecture and must be an objective common to all Member States. The rationalization of the agenda and improvement of the methods of work of the General Assembly are important aspects of the reform, which is necessary to enhance the technical and administrative efficiency of this body. But more importantly, the revitalization process should include the political role of the General Assembly and its authority, as defined in the Charter of the United Nations. The reform of the General Assembly should also improve its relations with the other main organs of the United Nations in order to avoid duplication of functions and means.

The Republic of San Marino believes that the role of the General Assembly should not be limited to that of a mere body where resolutions are adopted. On the contrary, it should be a forum for the exchange of ideas and debate, where solutions to today's challenges can be found, and where a global consensus on issues of common interest can be reached. In that regard, with a view to enabling the Assembly to fully perform its task, San Marino supports the prerogative of its President to organize thematic debates on the most relevant and urgent issues at the international level.

In that context, I underline the great importance attached by my country to the initiative of the outgoing President to organize, together with the Secretary-General, the high-level thematic debate on the state of the world economy and finance in 2012, which took place on 17 and 18 May here in New York. The Republic of San Marino, together with Turkey, had the honour and the pleasure to facilitate that event. The debate was an efficient way to reaffirm the central role of the United Nations, and in particular of the General Assembly, by enhancing its deeply democratic nature and its indisputable legitimacy in dealing with issues that affect the entire world community.

Four years ago, the world economy suffered a devastating financial crisis, the consequences of which are still evident to all. A prompt response by the Group of Twenty and its central banks was able to avoid the worst effects of this crisis, but the situation is still precarious. According to forecasts, many developed countries will experience stagnation and in some cases recession. Economic growth has slowed down in many other countries. Today, unemployment has reached the highest levels, in particular among young people and women. Increases in the prices of food products and persistent inequalities contribute to higher poverty rates and cause increasingly violent social tensions.

Problems connected with sovereign debts in Europe have further worsened global economic crisis. The crisis has severely hit many countries of the world, thus becoming one of today's major challenges to our Organization as well. It is now more than ever necessary to find new strategies, solutions and, more importantly, to create a sense of solidarity among our countries and peoples.

For those reasons too, the organization this year of a thematic debate on the state of the world economy and finance was extremely important. My country firmly believes that this exercise should be repeated at this session of the General Assembly and perhaps at later sessions, at least until the crisis has been overcome. Indeed, when we talk about the revitalization of the General Assembly, we think of a forum where all members of the international community have the opportunity to exchange ideas on the most important and urgent themes that have a global dimension and need a global response. In our opinion, the Organization should play a leadership role in the promotion of fair and inclusive growth, sustainable development and the elimination of poverty and hunger.

The reform of the Security Council is part of a wider reform of the United Nations and remains a central theme of the activity of the General Assembly. Over the past few years, the Security Council has approved a growing number of peacekeeping operations and has been increasingly involved in extremely important issues concerning international peace and security. The reform of that body, based on the widest possible political consensus, is therefore necessary and must be carried out with the utmost commitment by all Member States.

The Republic of San Marino is grateful to Ambassador Tanin for the wisdom and impartiality with which he has presided over intergovernmental negotiations on the reform. Our country is convinced that the intergovernmental negotiations launched three years ago still represent the right framework to find a solution, taking into account the interests and positions of all. Although the various groups of countries still express different positions, it must be recognized that some steps forward have been taken in the reform process. San Marino believes that the reform should lead to an enlarged, more representative, transparent and efficient Security Council. Moreover, it believes that the five strongly interconnected fundamental themes of the reform need to be considered as a whole.

Over the past few years, some new bloody and violent conflicts have broken out. We have also witnessed a massive popular uprising spreading across the squares of cities in North Africa and the Middle East. At the forefront of the Arab revolution were young people, educated and penalized by exclusion from the labour market. The situation is still unstable, and we are unable to imagine what the future of such countries will look like. However, we must support them in their struggle for democracy, liberty and social justice.

Furthermore, today we are witnessing the Syrian conflict, the violence of which is unacceptable. There are clear reports on the atrocities perpetrated against the population: mass killings, rapes, summary executions and torture. Children have been among the innocent victims of the massacres. San Marino firmly condemns those atrocities, in the same way as it condemns any violation of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We hope that the Security Council will be able to reach an agreement soon on how to settle the Syrian crisis. San Marino seizes this opportunity to express its most sincere wishes to His Excellency Lakhdar Brahimi for having accepted a difficult task.

The commitment of the General Assembly concerning the Syrian crisis reflects an important mission of our Organization: to keep the peace worldwide and to ensure respect for freedoms and human rights. The Republic of San Marino expresses its satisfaction with the adoption, on 3 August last, of resolution 66/253 B, which we co-sponsored.

Another important theme this year on the agenda of the General Assembly has been the improvement of disaster prevention and response. That theme has recently gained greater importance in the political agenda. Rising temperatures, earthquakes and droughts have caused unprecedented humanitarian disasters. Many populations have suffered food and health insecurity, thus becoming fully aware of their vulnerability. Disasters are, of course, not only natural ones but also caused by human beings. The international community must be able to rapidly and efficiently respond to emergency situations. A fundamental way to reduce the risks connected with natural disasters is undoubtedly to invest in the most vulnerable regions in order to build the capacities necessary to prevent them, so that action can be taken before disasters occur.

In the short term, however, it is essential to provide our political and financial support so as to overcome the consequences of disasters. In that regard, I am proud of the fact that my country, despite its small size, is ranked fifty-second among donors to the Central Emergency Response Fund.

We are extremely grateful to the Secretary-General, as well as to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Fund, for their rapid and fundamental action in favour of populations in humanitarian emergency and for their substantial contribution. Humanitarian and development issues, particularly sustainable development, are inevitably intertwined, and our success in providing an efficient response to natural disasters certainly has a direct impact on our capacity to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Indeed, as this is a global economic crisis, responses must also have a global dimension. The United Nations, on account of its universal character, must play a key role in the decision-making process on the world economy and sustainable development, with a view to finding new solutions and to promoting a political consensus on these issues.

The Organization must play a leadership role in the promotion of fair and inclusive growth, sustainable development and the elimination of poverty and hunger. In that context, San Marino welcomes the results of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held last June in Rio. Resolution 66/288, entitled "The future we want", marked the conclusion of long and complex negotiations at the end of which States finally recognized their common responsibilities. Now the most important thing is for the commitments undertaken to be respected so that the future that is wanted and set out in the resolution can become a reality.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to the same rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind. Unfortunately, in today's world there is a clear and direct relationship among disability, poverty and social exclusion. According to estimates, approximately 15 per cent of the world's population is affected by disabilities, and about two thirds of disabled people live in developing countries. Many of them cannot actively participate in their societies. This situation is not limited only to developing countries. Indeed, women, men and children with disabilities are often victims of discrimination even in the richest societies.

San Marino was among the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. That Convention and its optional Protocol cover a wide range of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. My country is pleased that the Convention has been ratified by more than half of Member States and hopes that it will soon be ratified by all. Each country has the duty to fully implement the Convention. An effective and positive change in the lives of people with disabilities will be possible only if it is fully implemented.

The Republic of San Marino congratulates the General Assembly on its decision to convene a high-level meeting on disability and development in September 2013 and hopes that the meeting will be a great success.

Today we all recognize and appreciate the fundamental role of women. Nonetheless, the discrimination and violence to which women are still often subjected are among the major concerns of the United Nations. In many countries, maternal mortality is still worrisome, especially in the poorest areas of the world. Women are the most affected by HIV. In many parts of the world, women continue to be subjected to atrocious and humiliating practices. Improving the status of women all over the world is our responsibility, a responsibility which all States must share. To that end, in order to promote the empowerment of women, it is essential to guarantee women's access to schooling and education and to improve their participation in political, social and economic life at all levels. The Republic of San Marino welcomes the proposal to hold a global conference on women in 2015, 20 years after the Beijing summit.

Despite the fact that child mortality is decreasing, the most recent estimates show that in 2010 approximately 7.6 million children died before the age of 5. Moreover, according to estimates, in 2015 about 72 million children will not have access to schooling. Recently, the drought and food emergency in the Horn of Africa has had a devastating impact on about 13 million people, in particular women and children. Almost 5 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are affected by HIV.

Children are still the most vulnerable group of the population and are subjected to violence, abuse and exploitation. A vast number of children all over the world do not still have access to basic services, health care and education. Besides facing global challenges such as the economic crisis and the problems connected with climate change, States must find the resources necessary to best meet the needs of children and to immediately improve the conditions of those living in the poorest areas of the world. It is imperative for us all if we want to guarantee to the global community a future worthy of the name.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

Mr. Shresta (Nepal): Let me begin by congratulating Mr. Jeremić on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. My delegation assures him of its full support in the discharge of his responsibilities.

I also take this opportunity to place on record our profound appreciation to the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, for having successfully presided over the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly. Let me also express our sincere gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his strong commitment and dedication in serving the United Nations.

In establishing the United Nations at a time when the world was emerging from the ashes of successive devastating wars, our founding fathers envisioned a peaceful, stable, just and prosperous world. Nearly seven decades later, the lofty objectives of the United Nations Charter are yet to be fully realized. Threats to international peace and security remain unabated, with traditional sources of threats continuing alongside the emergence of new sources and forms of conflict. In fact, the sense of insecurity seems to be more pervasive today as people around the world continue to face a wide range of situations, characterized by the legacy of colonialism, injustice, domination, exploitation, hatred, intolerance, exclusion, xenophobia and so on. Economic insecurity in the face of the heightened global economic and financial crises and fierce competition for dwindling resources and energy security also play their part in generating tensions in many parts of the world.

The concept of collective security being the core pillar of the United Nations Charter has often been undermined through recourse to dispute-settlement means that are outside the purview of a multilateral mechanism. Unilateralism and the selective interpretation of the provisions of the Charter risk inciting more conflict and confrontation rather than understanding and cooperation. That necessitates wider respect and observance of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and non-interference as the bedrock principles of international relations. Those principles cannot and should not be put to the political test under any circumstances.

The growing challenges do not mean that the role and importance of the United Nations have diminished, but rather demand a more effective and stronger Organization. We must internalize that reality and move forward, grasping the true spirit of its founding principles and purposes.

Nepal supports a just and lasting solution to the Middle East. It is our principled position to support the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State on the basis of the United Nations resolutions. The peaceful and secure coexistence of the independent States of a sovereign Palestine and Israel are crucial to ensuring lasting peace in the Middle East.

We call for an end to the violence and the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis by the Syrian people themselves. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Syria must be upheld.

We are of the firm opinion that the protracted embargo on Cuba is unjustified and needs to be ended immediately and unconditionally.

We recognize the legitimate rights of every sovereign State to pursue the development of nuclear technology solely for peaceful purposes and under effective international supervision. We stand firmly against nuclear proliferation, the arms race and the misuse of nuclear technology for ulterior motives.

We strongly oppose and renounce violence and physical attacks on diplomats anywhere under any pretext.

We reiterate our call for general and complete elimination of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction in a time-bound manner. The international community should work in unison to strengthen controls over small arms and light weapons to prevent their pervasive abuse by criminal elements.

It is heartening to note that, as a major troop-contributing country, Nepal has already provided over 92,000 professional and dedicated peacekeepers to the United Nations for various operations since its first participation in 1959. We remain steadfast in our commitment to international peace and security and affirm that our contribution to that noble cause will continue. While calling for timely reforms in that flagship activity, we stress the importance of equitable representation of troop-contributing countries, at the leadership level, both at United Nations Headquarters and in field missions.

I would like to reaffirm Nepal's unreserved condemnation of terrorism wherever it occurs and in all its forms and manifestations. We renew our call for an expeditious conclusion of the negotiations on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. As we continue to combat terrorism, we must not forget that durable peace can be built only on the firm pillars of the prevention of conflict, the peaceful resolution of disputes, persistent efforts for disarmament, poverty reduction, development and respect for diversity, fairness and justice. There is a need to differentiate between terrorism and struggles for liberation, freedom and sustainable peace and development.

Our commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and inclusive development is unflinching. The mutually reinforcing effects of such principles foster the active participation of the people in governance processes towards safeguarding peace, security and development. To address Nepal's post-conflict transition needs, we have established mechanisms and processes for the protection and promotion of human rights and for their monitoring at the highest level and at various tiers of the sub-national level.

As a party to 22 human rights conventions, including seven core instruments, we have established several laws that ensure the rights of all sectors of society, including women, children and marginalized and deprived communities. We are committed to controlling cross-border human trafficking and to doing our utmost to ensure that the rights and interests of migrant workers are protected in countries that are destinations for labour. The National Human Rights Commission, which is an independent constitutional body, operates as the country's all-powerful watchdog for the protection and promotion of human rights. We are committed to strengthening that specialized national institution as a true custodian of human rights.

Nepal has provided shelter to a large number of refugees on humanitarian grounds. While we appreciate the assistance of the international community in supporting refugees, we reiterate that their voluntary repatriation to their homeland with dignity and honour is the only durable solution to the refugee problem.

We underscore that the rule of law at the international level is as important as at the national level in ensuring the sovereign equality of all States, respect for their territorial integrity and political independence and non-intervention in their internal affairs. Those are essential principles for peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation among States.

The issue of sustainable development has come to the forefront of today's global discourse. It was the focus of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). We believe that we need to pursue not only sustainable development goals, but also a development path towards equal prosperity through meaningful development opportunities by eradicating the deeply entrenched inequalities and global exploitative practices. In our opinion, freeing all human beings from the dehumanizing clutches of poverty and hunger should be the first essential step towards that end. The outcome document of Rio+20 (resolution 66/288, annex) sets out a broad framework for global action for "The future we want" and a post-2015 global development agenda. The need of the hour is to ensure effective implementation.

As we all have come to realize, climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Its insidious effects are visible everywhere and are compounded by disasters of increasing magnitude and frequency. Countries like Nepal, which make a negligible contribution to greenhouse gases but have to bear the disproportionate brunt of the impacts of climate change, deserve special assistance in creating and maintaining climate-resilient societies. Negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change should continue to be guided by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in letter and spirit. Nepal hopes that the successor mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol ensures binding commitments and climate justice. The various funding mechanisms for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures must be activated, and action must be taken on an urgent basis.

The world we live in is more unjust today than when we inherited it. Contrary to much-touted popular belief, the profusion in knowledge, the revolution in science and technology and increased mobility in ideas and global capital, though often termed as advancements characteristic of the modern world, have failed to deliver significant contributions to making our planet safer and more just. They could have, but that is not the reality. It is an irony that our capacities to produce goods and services have increased manyfold, leading to an unprecedented accumulation of wealth, but over one third of the world's population is forced to live in abject poverty.

The rapid globalization of finance and an unsustainable consumption of resources have made a few people enormously rich at the cost of the rest, making for the greatest inequality among human beings ever in history. Obviously, the transformative power of globalization has not been utilized for the benefit of the masses. The direction and pattern of the current form of economic globalization therefore call for a change in its mode of operation so that it becomes more inclusive and responsive to the needs of poor and marginalized people.

Nepal views the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 and China as important multilateral forums that should play an active role in advancing the United Nations agenda, in line with the Charter objectives of pursuing the shared goals of peace, progress and prosperity. The principles and purposes of NAM are of continued relevance in forging developing countries' collective moral resolve to create an equitable, fair and just world order, combating the conservative forces of repression, invasion, intimidation and injustice. The ideals of NAM, as reiterated at its recently held sixteenth summit in Teheran, go a long way towards fostering better understanding and cooperative relations among countries and peoples of the world.

The least developed countries (LDCs) are suffering from dehumanizing marginalization and deprivation of the basic necessities of life. This state of affairs is a blemish on the sheer affluence achieved in the globalized world. Global sustainable development will not be possible without sustainable development for the LDCs, including substantial improvement in the quality of life of their 880 million people. The world must pay due attention in deeds as well as in words to the special and different needs and requirements of the LDCs.

The landlocked LDCs (LLDCs), among which Nepal figures, have to bear the additional disadvantages of physical and non-physical barriers in trade. That results in increased transactional costs for transit transport, which renders their international trade uncompetitive. Transit countries, regional groups, the international financial institutions and other development partners should work together to overcome those difficulties by investing in transport infrastructure links and trade facilitation measures. We underline the central role of the United Nations in promoting the development agenda, taking into account the special needs and development challenges confronting the LDCs, the LLDCs and other vulnerable groups of countries.

Timely and ongoing reforms of the United Nations are necessary to strengthen and revitalize this world body so that it can respond to increasing global challenges. The General Assembly must be strengthened and endowed with decision-making power and authority commensurate with its global representation. Nepal supports the expansion of the Security Council in both member categories and hopes to see greater accountability and transparency in its working methods. The Economic and Social Council must be strengthened for the promotion of international economic cooperation, coordination, policy review and dialogue. It must also formulate and develop the social and economic agenda and work for the implementation of agreed international development goals, with special emphasis on development for LDCs, LLDCs and small island developing States, among others.

We seek an increased role for the United Nations system in global economic governance, with strengthened coordination and cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, to reflect the dynamics of change.

Let me briefly say a few words about the current situation in my country. The historic task we face is still to positively conclude the historical transition we are undergoing as early as possible. We need the Constituent Assembly to promulgate a new constitution and we need to finally complete the peace process. Based on the historic people's movement of 2006, which was the culmination of many decades of struggle by the Nepalese people against autocracy, we abolished the monarchy and established a republican State. We also adopted other important principles, such as secularism, federalism and inclusive, proportional representation and participation, although they are yet to be codified in a new constitution.

The Constituent Assembly was elected for the first time in Nepal's political history in 2008 and was mandated to draft a constitution addressing the aspirations of the people for change, a restructuring of the State and an end to all forms of exploitation and discrimination based on class, ethnicity, gender and region. The Constituent Assembly worked for four years to draft the new constitution and completed 80 to 90 per cent of the drafting, but never finalized the text. Not having met its deadline, and after the Supreme Court ruled against extensions, it was dissolved on 27 May this year.

We have made qualitative progress on the technical side of the peace process, mainly the integration of former Maoist combatants. There is no outstanding problem left in that regard and the process is near completion. A transitional justice mechanism is in place to promote the peace and reconciliation process needed for the completion of the peace process. But we have yet to find a solution to the Constituent Assembly's inability to create a constitution. Political parties are engaged in dialogue and negotiations in that regard and are seriously committed to finding a consensus solution. National consensus is the only option to find a way out of the current impasse. We hope we will be able to do so without excessive delay.

As we go through the process of institutionalizing change, we are of the firm belief that democracy, development and peace are interrelated and interdependent. By "democracy", we mean inclusive and participatory democracy, and by "development" we mean people-centred development with social justice and socioeconomic transformation. Without democracy and development, there cannot be lasting and sustainable peace. And democracy, development, peace and stability should safeguard national sovereignty. Thus democracy, development, peace and national sovereignty are the major components of our process of change. From our experience, we can say that democracy has both universal and particular aspects.

We thank the international community, including the United Nations, for its continued support for and cooperation in our peace and constitution-making process from the very beginning, and hope that it will continue in the future.

Nature has blessed us with an outstanding mountain range with gushing rivers, incredible biodiversity and a landscape spectrum of contrast and vibrancy. We are equally rich in ancient cultural heritage, multiple ethnic cultures and a diverse mosaic of hardworking people. We need a stable and peaceful environment if we are to make effective use of those diverse endowments for socioeconomic transformation, along with ongoing State restructuring. Only then will it be possible to translate the historic achievements we have made on the political front into tangible results in economic and human development terms.

As a symbolic gesture to institutionalize peace for development in the national, regional and global contexts, we want to develop Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the apostle of peace, into an international city of peace. In that respect, we call for international support and cooperation to realize the initiative.

In conclusion, I would like in all humility to draw the attention of all world leaders to the core reality that if we do not reach the goal of global peace and prosperity together, then nobody will. That is why we must act together accordingly.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Tonio Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Borg (Malta): I extend my warmest congratulations to Mr. Jeremić on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. The demanding agenda of this Assembly makes that no easy task, but I assure him of Malta's support and friendship.

Over a year ago, the protagonists of the Arab Spring proclaimed that their time had come. They shed their blood for freedom, calling for an end to the status quo of oppression and injustice. Unfortunately, extremists persist in their efforts to derail that call. United States

Ambassador Christopher Stevens was, sadly, one of their victims. One cannot stress strongly enough the importance of protecting the inviolability of diplomatic premises and personnel, and reiterate our collective condemnation of the deplorable acts perpetrated recently in various capitals of our neighbourhood.

Many doubted the success of the Arab Spring; many feared its call for change. Yet change did come. We are now witnessing the first seeds of democracy blossoming in places where that would previously have been unthinkable. And more change is yet to come. People around the world are calling for it. Theirs is a call that pits us against conventional thinking, pushing us out of our comfort zone and into the unfamiliar — a call for humankind to go beyond the borders of human difference and indifference. We have the choice to heed that call or to ignore it, but make no mistake — we do have a choice.

Malta knows all too well what the call for change is about. It experiences it first hand as it receives those fleeing war, hunger and persecution, arriving on its shores after a perilous journey in search of a better life. Malta recognizes that we need to give those people safe refuge, and we do so with a sense of solidarity and a strong belief that every human life is worth saving. We are committed to giving assistance, and we remain steadfast in our belief that Malta will continue its historical role of welcoming those who are bereft of human rights and dignity.

It is in that spirit that Malta calls upon the international community to give those people genuine alternatives, and to no longer accept that it is a problem in someone else's backyard. We want to ensure that the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals does not become a simple check-marking exercise, but instead underscores a truly global effort that will lift millions out of situations of deprivation, disease and discrimination. Those goals must be sustained long after the media has gone and the speeches are over, and we urge the Assembly to spare no effort in seeing that it is done.

The choice of freedom has seen Malta's neighbour to the south hold its first free and fully democratic elections in 60 years. We salute Libya on its recent successes. For many, the act of voting was a success in itself. The Libyan people voted for their policy-makers. They did not vote for ideology, but for visionaries who will breathe life into their aspirations. It is a time of celebration for our neighbours, and Malta joins others in recognizing their achievements, as well as the achievements of the other countries of the Arab Spring.

Yet as we bear witness to the wave of democratic reform drifting across the southern Mediterranean shores, we must also recall that others are still struggling for freedom. The situation in Syria cannot but trouble us. Oppression and violence are never the solution. They only stifle the inevitable for a short while, for the human spirit can never be defeated. And it is our duty, as the international community, to respond. It is not a question of resolutions and syntax. It is our moral obligation to ensure that the people of Syria are not abandoned to a tragic fate.

The time to sit on the fence and live with prejudices and division is over. Malta firmly believes that now can be the right time for a new era — not just for the southern littoral shores of the Mediterranean Sea, but for the whole basin. The Mediterranean region has known too many wars, too many divisions and far too many prejudices. As the heart of the Mediterranean, Malta understands well the nuances of the basin, and it is this understanding that pushes us to reaffirm our commitment to the promotion of prosperity and peace across the whole Mediterranean region and beyond. Malta's initiative to convene a European Union-League of Arab States ministerial meeting in Malta in 2008 was specifically aimed at attaining that. We salute the decision for the "Malta II" meeting to take place in Cairo next November.

Our efforts did not stop there. In a few days' time, Malta will host the 5+5 Heads of State and Government Meeting of the Western Mediterranean Forum. That grouping should offer an excellent opportunity to discuss such issues. The summit meeting coincides with the dramatic changes taking place in the political landscape in North Africa. The expectation for the implementation of concrete action in the Euro-Mediterranean region, transcending ineffective declarations, statements and conclusions, is important. I hope that the Malta Summit will meet the aspirations of the peoples of the northern and southern basin of the Mediterranean. We cannot fail in that regard. We owe it to our peoples.

However, if we want to truly embrace the changes that are taking place around us, we must take them further. The call to rise above stalemate and stagnation is nowhere more evident than in the Middle East peace process, where the fear of change is holding all those involved back. The parties concerned must face some uncomfortable truths in order to overcome the stumbling blocks. Bickering over who does what when is not the way forward. Forging common ground does not equate with giving in.

Malta believes that the international community must redouble its efforts in that process and that there can be no rest until the world welcomes a truly stable and secure Middle East. We owe it to the Palestinians and the Israelis. We owe it to the wider Mediterranean region, which has now been deadlocked for far too long in the grips of that struggle. There really is no other option than that, for the alternative is further entrenchment of the positions held and more extremism and instability. Malta reaffirms its commitment to the efforts of the United Nations and the European Union, in particular towards the attainment of the goal of two viable States living side by side in harmony. However, that solution is possible only if it is feasible on the ground. That means no unilateral action, which would make it an unattainable reality.

A year from now, we should no longer be talking of a Middle East peace process but of a Middle East in peace, and that is that. The sceptics among us will note that that is what was said last year and, of course, even the year before. For over 60 years, we have been making that call but we must not let the opportunity slip away once again. The Arab Spring shows us that we need to answer the call of history now. It can be different this time.

The events happening around us highlight not only our sense of duty to promote and protect human rights worldwide but also our sense of responsibility, for the actions that we take or fail to take today will have a bearing on future generations. Malta drew the attention to that belief with its call for a universal declaration on human responsibilities, made in this very Hall during the sixty-fourth session of the Assembly in 2009.

We know that we are not alone in the endeavour. We share with other Member States a commitment to solidarity, cohesive ideas and a harmonious discourse in favour of the sustainability of the planet and the stewardship of its peoples. That conviction encourages us to push forward with our efforts for we are certain that history will be on our side.

In conclusion, our destiny is what we perceive our future to be. We are convinced that the United Nations stands for the betterment of humanity. We remain committed to living up to the expectations and aspirations to which we adhere under its Charter. Most of all, we need to embrace change. The future begins with the choices that we make today.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Uri Rosenthal, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Mr. Rosenthal (Netherlands): Last month, I visited a refugee camp at the border between Turkey and Syria. I met children, women and men, who told me how they had escaped the violence and suffering in their home country. They had fled the bloodshed of a regime that is using indiscriminate violence against its own people. They had fled a country where children are being tortured, women raped and innocent civilians killed. They had lost their friends, family and homes, but they had not lost hope for a better future.

One of the people whom I met near the border was Medya, the 25-year-old mother of a five-year-old girl. She had fled the city of Homs eight months earlier. Now, she travels back and forth between Homs and a refugee camp in Turkey at great personal danger. She risks her life to report to the world on the situation in Syria. Her reports are broadcast on major international networks.

Medya told me about the terrible events that she had witnessed. I was touched by her sorrow and impressed by her determination. Her strong desire for freedom is something to which we can all relate. Those who have struggled for freedom do not give up easily. However, it is also clear that those refugees need the support of the international community at large. They need food, shelter and security. Ultimately, they need an effective United Nations and a strong international legal order.

Promoting the international legal order is enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It is a mission that we share with many in this Assembly. Together with 49 other countries, we are helping to establish legal order and security in Afghanistan, for example. I want to pay tribute to the Dutch and the other men and women, soldiers and civilians, currently serving there.

The Hague, a city of peace and justice, is known for its contribution to the international legal order. It is home to the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which are both based at the Peace Palace. Next year, we will proudly celebrate its centenary. Former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recognized the role of the Netherlands in the international legal order by naming The Hague the legal capital of the world.

We need international law to protect people, societies and nations, or, as former Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently wrote, the United Nations Charter was issued in the name of we the peoples, not we the Governments. So we need a stronger international legal order, first, to preserve peace and security; secondly, to protect freedom; and thirdly, to promote prosperity. That is the task that we face.

A strong international legal order helps to preserve peace and security. To achieve that goal, we need greater unity. I regret the persistent disagreement in the Security Council. It has prevented the United Nations from taking decisive action on Syria. The world is in desperate need of a strong, united and determined Security Council.

Mediation, arbitration and judicial settlement are indispensable for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. We should cherish and develop those tools, as Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson has so rightly said.

Better implementation of existing treaties on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament is of paramount importance.

An effective international legal order means that countries are bound by their promises. Iran must completely fulfil its International Atomic Energy Agency obligations and abide by Security Council resolutions. The burden of proof is on Iran. As I said to my Iranian colleague, Minister Salehi, earlier this week: You are the one to convince the world of the peaceful character of your nuclear programme — not us.

The international agendas on nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons must lead to concrete results and new treaties. The United Nations and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva need to do better.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague will this year celebrate its fifteenth anniversary. It should stand ready to assist in addressing the chemical weapons problem in Syria.

The Netherlands will host the next Nuclear Security Summit, in 2014, as part of our efforts to enhance security and fight nuclear terrorism.

Negotiations on a robust and effective arms trade treaty should recommence as soon as possible.

A stronger legal order also promotes freedom. It promotes human rights, reinforces the responsibility to protect and helps prevent atrocities. Greater freedom means equal rights for men and women alike. Women make up 50 per cent of humankind. We need the full 100 per cent of humankind. It is in every country's own interest to make sure that women are actively involved in society, the economy and politics. They must participate in the power structures as leaders of the world.

Human rights cannot be imposed from the outside. But Governments carry the responsibility for observing their international human rights obligations and commitments. There is therefore a need to communicate constantly about the obligations and commitments.

The role of the Human Rights Council in promoting freedom is crucial. We need to improve the way in which it functions. Countries that aspire to join the Council should be genuinely committed to respecting human rights. I am proud to reiterate our genuine commitment and to announce the Dutch candidature for the Human Rights Council from 2015 to 2017.

People should be free to live their lives in peace and security. Therefore, every State has an obligation to prevent aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Prevention is key. But if countries cannot or will not act, the international community has a responsibility to protect.

A strong international and domestic legal order promotes prosperity and, let me state it emphatically, economic growth. Trade, investment, innovation and economic development will all benefit from a stable, predictable and rules-based business climate.

The economy cannot thrive in societies where human rights are violated, corruption is rampant and Government revenues are wasted. That is one of the lessons of the Arab awakening. Sustainable prosperity and sustainable economic growth depend upon a strong, legitimate and reliable legal order.

For that matter, free trade agreements and a well-functioning World Trade Organization are crucial for stimulating growth. According to the World Bank, a new global trade deal would increase global welfare tremendously.

A good way to promote foreign direct investment is by enhancing arbitration and conflict resolution mechanisms. The Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague has an increasingly important role to play.

Protecting intellectual property rights effectively fosters innovation. We should therefore strengthen the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Finally, the Millennium Development Goals need a new agenda, with bold ideas to end poverty and plans to promote sustainable development and foster economic growth. The private sector is crucial to achieving those goals, especially when it comes to unlocking the potential of small and medium-sized enterprises. To quote renowned economist Paul Collier, "We cannot make poverty history unless the countries of the bottom billion start to grow".

The United Nations is indispensable for the agenda of peace, freedom and prosperity. The widening gap between the increasing expectations we have of the United Nations, on the one hand, and of its capacity to deliver, on the other, is a cause of serious concern. Therefore, we need a more effective, efficient and coherent United Nations.

The Security Council must act decisively when serious crimes are involved and international peace and security are at stake. All United Nations organizations should deliver as one. The Secretary-General's reform proposals must be implemented.

Emerging Powers rightly ask for more influence, due to new political and economic realities. The Security Council should be reformed while taking those realities into account. At the same time, the larger share of those emerging Powers in the world economy should be reflected in the relative contributions of Member States to the United Nations budget.

The Members of the United Nations need to take action in five areas. First, countries should respect universal human rights without distinction. That key principle also applies to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Secondly, the rights of religious minorities should be guaranteed all over the world. Governments should protect religious groups against violence. Thirdly, countries should recognize the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, as the Secretary-General has requested. Fourthly, countries should adhere to the principle of the responsibility to protect. That applies to prevention, protection and prosecution. Fifthly, countries that have not done so to date should join the International Criminal Court. That will ensure that civilians are protected and the perpetrators of atrocities are prosecuted.

That takes me back to Syria. The Syrian crisis highlights the mounting challenges of the United Nations and its States Members. I applaud the active stance of the Secretary-General with regard to Syria. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and many other organizations are providing crucial assistance to the victims of the violence. I want to pay explicit tribute to the Governments of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for their invaluable efforts to alleviate the suffering of the thousands of refugees.

In conclusion, for me, meeting Medya, that courageous Syrian journalist and mother, has given a voice to those refugees. I hope that I will meet Medya, that 25-year-old mother of a five-year-old child, again in the near future in Homs, Syria. I want to see her live in an inclusive and prosperous Syria, where democracy and human rights replace terror and violence. It is about democracy and human rights. That is our aim. I want to see her live in a Syria where jobs and economic opportunities have replaced poverty and despair.

That woman, Medya, has already shown the courage and the will to contribute to Syria's future. Together, we, the peoples of the United Nations, should show that same courage. Together, we must preserve peace, protect freedom and promote prosperity. Together, let us build a stronger international legal order.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alfredo Moreno Charme, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Chile.

Mr. Moreno Charme (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to convey to Mr. Jeremić our warmest congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session and to once again extend to him our fullest cooperation. We would also like to convey our gratitude to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his significant work during the previous session. We also congratulate Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on his leadership at a time marked by the immense scale of the challenges that we face.

Chile's foreign policy is based on principles such as the defence of democracy, respect for human rights and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Among others, those principles form part of the Charter of the United Nations. Their observance provides for coexistence among States at the international and national levels, and thus preserves, for nations and their peoples, the most precious asset of national societies and the international community, namely, peace.

Peace is the basic value at the root of this body. However, despite the efforts made, serious problems persist internationally, as well as nationally in some Member States. We have witnessed the Arab Spring, which, by channelling the legitimate expression of its peoples for greater freedom, democracy and respect for human rights, resulted in some cases, without prejudice to the difficulties that remain to be overcome, in processes that have led to democratic changes. Regrettably, in other cases, it has given rise to repression and violence.

The repression of their people by dictatorial regimes and the inability to peacefully forge democratic transition processes are the result of a mistaken way of engaging in and understanding politics. Confrontation has prevailed over tolerance, violence over dialogue and conflict over understanding, as we see now happening in Syria.

From this rostrum, we reiterate the call to all parties, in particular the Government of that country, for an immediate end to the violence, respect for human rights and the establishment of the foundations for a dialogue that can lead to a political solution of the current crisis, in which justice and the rule of law prevail. The international community bears the responsibility to support that process, while respecting the principles of non-intervention, territorial integrity and, above all, human life.

We must condemn the intolerance that shows a lack of respect for different cultures and beliefs and has given rise to outbreaks of violence. Nothing justifies the criminal act committed in Libya against United States diplomats. We vigorously condemn that event and any other act of violence, which, in that particular case, negates the essence of the diplomatic function, which this forum must specifically seek to defend with the utmost resolve and determination.

In addition, we have resolutely supported all international efforts towards a just, legitimate and lasting solution of the problem between Palestine and Israel. We recognize the Palestinian State — a country that we hope very shortly to welcome to the Organization. We strongly believe that the Palestinian people have the right to a free, sovereign and democratic State. However, we also note that the State of Israel has the right to recognized, safe and respected borders. Only in that way will Palestinians and Israelis be able to coexist and move forward in peace and harmony.

The leaders of the States members of the Assembly have the moral obligation and enormous responsibility of seeking to harmonize interests in order for reason to prevail. The United Nations is the sole international forum with the necessary capacity to address the maintenance of peace, security, the protection of human rights and international development cooperation. It is therefore our responsibility to strive to find the means for consensus to enable us to cooperate in resolving current conflicts, averting future ones, preserving peace and launching a cycle of development for the benefit of our peoples.

Chile, through a sustained effort, has enjoyed more than 100 years of peaceful international coexistence on the basis of understanding and dialogue, as well as legally and politically respected border agreements and treaties, as borne out by our peaceful vocation. Nearly 40 years ago, however, my country experienced a crisis that shattered its institutional order and divided our society, leading to a confrontation with tragic consequences. Thanks to a united effort, an exemplary peaceful transition was possible. Despite the deep divisions that were a hallmark of that time, we were able to move forward in building a solid foundation owing to the willingness to reach an understanding that prevailed among political forces that previously held irreconcilable positions.

Moreover, despite its differences, Latin America has learned to live in diversity and has progressed more than other regions in the past decade. In our region, various kinds of Governments that propose different political and development models coexist. However, through dialogue, understanding and reason, we have reached consensus on establishing regional integration mechanisms that have enabled us to move forward with common goals. That policy, based on respect for differences and the pursuit of mutually beneficial integration, is at the heart of our foreign policy.

Just as mutual respect and human understanding are ground rules of our national policy to achieve freedom, progress and social justice, the same should occur in the international political arena. This is the best forum for the leaders of nations to debate ideas, free from absolute, exclusive or discriminatory positions, which inevitably lead to confrontation. Many of the problems facing us are due to the fact that the virtue of dialogue, which is the only means for our mutual understanding and civilized coexistence, is increasingly undermined.

However, countries alone cannot always find the basis for understanding in order to achieve the political stability that makes solid institution-building and economic and social development possible. The international community also has a responsibility. We believe that it is crucial not only to help countries emerge from crisis situations, but also to support them in peacebuilding and development in a comprehensive way. That means support for the rebuilding of political institutions and for internal reconciliation processes and social and economic development, which are tasks for which the Peacebuilding Commission was established. We strongly support its work.

In that context, with regard to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, we believe that the required modifications to its composition and size must be offset by strengthening the presence of the development component of the United Nations system through its agencies, funds and programmes. That is fundamental to helping the reconstruction and development of Haiti.

In that spirit of cooperation in peacebuilding, we also welcome with satisfaction, a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm the invitation of the Colombian Government to assist in the negotiations process launched to put an end to the internal conflict that has affected that brother country for more than 50 years, causing so much suffering. We commend the willingness and readiness of the parties and the courage of the Government of Colombia, which, building on the circumstances brought about through its efforts and patience in recent years, took the decision to initiate a peace process that, we trust, will end successfully to the benefit of all Colombians.

Mr. Charles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We have conveyed our vision of what we believe to be the most profound purpose of politics. On this occasion, we would also like to address the issue of Security Council reform. In order to strengthen its capacities and legitimacy, a more representative and democratic organ that is in line with the new international reality should be formed. Chile reiterates its support for a Security Council reform that envisages the expansion of its membership in the permanent and non-permanent categories, thus ensuring due regional representation and enhanced transparency of its working methods.

We also wish to reiterate our opposition to the veto power. However, given its existence, Chile supports the call for the veto not to be used in situations of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide or ethnic cleansing. The countries with the veto power have a great responsibility and the obligation to use it with moderation and transparency in seeking to resolve crises, putting aside national or ideological positions that hamper the system and render it ineffective.

In that context, our commitment to the main themes on the international peace and security agenda has led us to submit our candidature for Security Council for the period of 2014-2015. As part of that effort, we wish to help strengthen the effectiveness of the multilateral system based on democratic values and principles, namely, equality and individual freedoms and solidarity, which are substantial aspects of our foreign policy. We also wish to contribute to that from the perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Democracy demands respect for, and the promotion of, human rights, which requires full implementation of the rule of law. Chile is firmly committed to that. Our own experience regarding a shattered democracy, with tragic consequences for the rights of individuals, which I have already mentioned, underscores for us the importance of developing public policies. It also highlights the need to implement the instruments made available to us by the international system, with particular emphasis on those that support the most vulnerable, namely, children, women, young people, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and the elderly. In that regard, we support strengthening the functioning of the human rights treaty body system and the work undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition to the issue of peace, another acute problem for nations today is the international financial crisis. It has wrought havoc on markets, trade, finance, investment and, worse still, employment. As in the case of politics, where confrontation and the lack of dialogue impede solutions and compromises, in economics the improper practices of excessive spending, a lack of fiscal tightening and the absence of adequate regulatory frameworks triggered the crisis that currently affects us and whose end is not yet in sight.

The experience of our country and our region has taught us harshly in recent decades that progress and true development require measures that are not populist or short term. Governments must act responsibly and control public spending without turning to that as an easy solution to artificially promote an economic boom. The current crisis blatantly shows the painful consequences of such policies. A rigorous fiscal policy and the establishment of stabilization funds, like some countries have created, such as Norway on the basis of oil and Chile on the basis of copper, are examples of efficient mechanisms for economic stability and balancing global cycles.

Similarly, in seeking solutions to the crisis, we must avoid the temptation to resort to artificial and short-term measures. There are voices clamouring for the imposition of protectionist practices to boost the economy. Such practices may benefit a specific economic sector in the short term. However, they have a fleeting effect. Let us not fool ourselves. Protectionism protects inefficient industries and provides citizens with poor quality and more expensive products. Worse still, it undermines productivity, eliminates competition and entrepreneurship and hampers real development.

Our experience shows us that we must take the opposite path, namely, greater openness and more free trade. Threats to democracy are thereby overcome through greater democracy. Economic growth is boosted by greater openness to markets and fewer obstacles to global trade. Years ago, our country launched trade liberalization by, first, unilaterally reducing its tariffs and, subsequently, through free trade agreements that today extend to more than 60 countries and that represent more than 85 per cent of world gross domestic product. Chile has the most free trade agreements and has the world's eighth-lowest tariffs, at less than 1 per cent on average.

Despite external difficulties, that policy has enabled us to increase our growth by 6 per cent in the past two years and to achieve the region's highest per capita income. In turn, it has made it possible to reduce the level of unemployment, poverty and extreme poverty by creating new jobs and social protection programmes.

Real and effective integration goes beyond trade. We are also pursuing shared projects with other nations, such as the recent Pacific Alliance initiative, launched together with Peru, Mexico and Colombia. It focuses on the integration not only of goods and services, but also the free movement of people and capital, thus sharing the full potential of our economies. Such initiatives with Pacific Rim countries are not new. In 1994, we were already part of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, seeking to accelerate trade liberalization in a broad region that unites the largest economies on both sides of that ocean. Subsequently, in 2005, along with Singapore, New Zealand and Brunei Darussalam, we launched a process to forge an ambitious free trade agreement. Today, that project, known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, aspires to create the largest global free trade area with the accession of new members, including the United States.

Two years ago, only days after the Government that I represent assumed its duties, a natural disaster of global proportions, namely, the fifth-largest earthquake registered in the world since such disasters were recorded, caused destruction and death in our country. Chile recovered thanks to the solidarity and unity of its people and as a result of the generous assistance of friendly nations and organizations. Recently, President Sebastian Piñera Echeñique affirmed the announcement that he made at that time, pointing out that, by the end of his term in office, all material damage would be fully rebuilt.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of natural disasters — floods, tornados, typhoons, earthquakes and mudslides. There is no place on the planet that is not either suffering or has suffered from a natural disaster. No country has the capacity to deal with disasters of that scale alone. There is therefore a need for the assistance and solidarity among nations that we saw not only during the earthquake in 2010, but also at the time of the collapse of the San José mine, which affected 33 miners. The lives of those miners were saved thanks to their courage, to the determination of the Government of Chile to rescue them and to international cooperation.

In Chile, we have strengthened disaster preparedness and early-warning systems and have enhanced the national civil protection agency in order to ensure greater coordination at the national, regional and local levels. However, the occurrence of some of those natural phenomena is also linked to environmental protection. Preserving the environment is another topic that merits the attention of the international community and means that we should act responsibly to safeguard for future generations a clean environment and sustainable development that respects nature. The recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, namely, sustainable development goals, financing mechanisms and a mechanism to transfer and distribute clean energy, should now be implemented.

Chile assumed the position of the first pro tempore presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) with great satisfaction. The 33 member States of Latin America and the Caribbean agreed the Community's guiding principles and purposes, including the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights, political coordination, integration, the fight against poverty and inequality and stronger global engagement. Among the issues of interest to CELAC that I would like to underscore in this forum is support for the legitimate claims of the Argentine Republic in the dispute for sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas. We call for a resumption of negotiations with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in order to find a peaceful and lasting solution to that dispute. CELAC also wishes to underscore the need to put an end to the economic blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba. The General Assembly has adopted important resolutions on both matters.

We live in a world of great opportunities, but also significant challenges and global threats that require the coordinated action of the international community in order to ensure an appropriate response. Only through effective, efficient and inclusive multilateralism will we find the best way to respond to those great global challenges.

The United Nations system has the capacity to exercise leadership in pursuing international peace and security, in promoting sustainable development and cooperation and in protecting and promoting human rights. Also, in seeking to resolve the global economic crisis, in environmental protection and in the rapid international response to prevent and provide assistance in the case of natural disasters, we, as Member States, must demonstrate the political will to make that capacity a reality and thus ensure that the politically correct action is also morally correct.

The President of Bolivia mentioned, in terms that do not comply with the norms of good coexistence among nations, that country's maritime claim (see A/67/PV.11). Along with the formal note of reply that was submitted to the President of the General Assembly, in addressing this debate I feel obliged to categorically reject the position, affirmation and charges made against my country. It is timely to reiterate to the Assembly that there are no outstanding border issues between our States. Those matters are clearly set out in the 1904 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, and are fully respected.

Chile has fully met its obligations under that Treaty, allowing the most extensive free transit through its territory by means of high-quality infrastructure, as acknowledged by the Bolivians themselves. Bolivia has no right to claim access to the sea. The respect of border agreements between neighbouring countries is one of the cornerstones for coexistence among States and is the guarantor of international peace, as prevails between our countries.

Before this Organization, Chile reaffirms that the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, adopted in 2009, introduced provisions that contravene the framework of international law, which governs the peaceful coexistence among nations. Those provisions are therefore not enforceable with regard to our country. As declared by a committee of lawyers appointed by the League of Nations in 1921 and as acknowledged at the last session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, held in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, this is strictly a bilateral matter. Chile has continued to convey to Bolivia its readiness for brotherly dialogue, based on full respect for the treaties in force, which provide significant benefits for both peoples. It is in the hands of Bolivia to accept that invitation.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Bernard Kamillius Membe, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Membe (United Republic of Tanzania): At the outset, allow me to convey the fraternal greetings of His Excellency Mr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, who could not attend this session of the General Assembly due to other equally important engagements.

On behalf of the Government and people of the United Republic of Tanzania, I wish to congratulate Mr. Jeremić on his well-deserved election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. It is indeed a pleasure for me to participate in the general debate under his presidency. Similarly, I congratulate his predecessor and commend him on the manner in which he steered the work of the sixty-sixth session. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge and commend the Secretary-General and the entire Secretariat on their service to the Organization.

Echoing the President's words during the opening of the session, we meet here amid upheavals of unprecedented scope, characterized by multiple intra- and inter-State conflicts in the world and a time of emerging and worsening conflicts, most of which are taking place in Africa and the Middle East (see A/67/PV.1). Those conflicts have caused the deaths and suffering of millions of people, including children, women and the elderly. Undoubtedly, a new world order of lasting peace, security and freedom, as envisaged in the United Nations Charter, can be achieved through dialogue and reconciliation.

We applaud the fact that the theme of this general debate is "Adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". Similarly, we welcome the many initiatives undertaken at the national, regional and international levels in promoting that matter.

During the 50 years of the independence of the United Republic of Tanzania, we have witnessed and respected the effectiveness of preventive diplomacy. We have participated in various mediation processes in the region and on the continent, such as in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya and Madagascar. The involvement of former Presidents of Tanzania the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere and Benjamin William Mkapa, as well as His Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, in those processes is a clear testimony of our continued commitment to preventive diplomacy.

We are all too aware of the dire consequences of conflict, particularly when all the mechanisms provided for under the Charter of the United Nations to resolve conflicts fail to find a permanent solution and to ensure lasting peace. The situation in Syria is a case in point. It is important that we find ways to strengthen early-warning mechanisms and to prevent conflicts before they occur. In no case should we pursue actions that would encourage parties in conflict to resort to armed solutions instead of dialogue. While facilitating dialogue, it is also important that we uphold the principles of impartiality, objectivity and respect for international law. The unity of the entire membership is crucial in ending impunity and human rights violations, wherever they occur.

The pacific settlement of disputes as provided under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations has never been so pertinent. In the interest of maintaining peace and security, we should learn to keep our differences aside and not allow them to create divisions among us. I believe the presidency of Mr. Vuk Jeremić will guide us in that direction.

Tanzania is the current Chair of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defence and Security. We have taken up the mantle of leadership of the Organ at a time when some countries of the region face security challenges. Under the umbrella of SADC and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of Africa, we have resolved to find a durable solution to the crisis in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where rebel groups such as the Mouvement du 23 mars are destabilizing and threatening the peace and security of the entire region. Members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region have agreed to establish an international neutral force comprising 4,000 troops to address the problem. Tanzania has committed to contribute troops to the neutral force. Through the African Union (AU), we are taking the necessary steps to ensure that the deployment of this international neutral force is done under the mandate of the United Nations.

Likewise, Tanzania will work assiduously with other SADC member States to support the return to constitutional normalcy in Madagascar and the finalization of the drafting a new constitution in Zimbabwe, which will open the way to democratic elections by June 2013. We proceed in that endeavour with the firm belief that a solution in both countries will finally be achieved through the effective and constructive engagement of all parties concerned.

Twelve years ago, in the month of September, we met in this very Hall to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), which gave birth to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Three years from now, we will reach the deadline we agreed. We have undoubtedly made some progress on many fronts, but most developing States are unlikely to achieve all the goals by the deadline of 2015.

My country has also made progress in the achievement of the MDGs. It attained Goal 2, on universal primary education, back in 2009. It has also registered considerable gains on Goal 3, on promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as on Goal 6, on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. We have also achieved moderate results on MDGs 4 and 5, dealing with infant and maternal mortality, respectively. However, much more remains to be done to emancipate our people from the traps of poverty.

Our goals to improve the livelihood of our people must go beyond 2015. It is therefore necessary that we consider the post-MDG agenda as one that complements, instead of diverting our focus from the current MDGs. My delegation proposes a second generation of MDGs, whereby all our efforts are directed to ensure that MDGs are achieved post-2015 in those countries that will not have achieved them by 2015.

At the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, President Kikwete expressed serious concern regarding global food insecurity (see A/66/PV.15). Since then, the situation has worsened and the vulnerability of many developing countries has increased. We must work collectively to address food insecurity. We must increase food production and productivity on a sustainable basis, strengthen agricultural systems, and establish early-warning mechanisms, as we also must develop effective responses to calamities such as those in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region. While ensuring food security, we need also to address the issue of nutrition. It is in that regard that Tanzania is a proud member of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement.

At the national level, the Government is undertaking various initiatives to ensure food security through public-private partnerships. My Government has had the pleasure of hosting the Africa Green Revolution Forum, in Arusha, which concluded today, with the participation of African leaders, ministers, private agribusiness firms, financial institutions, farmers, non-governmental organizations and agricultural experts. The Forum was organized by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa.

United Nations reforms are long overdue. The United Nations is composed of its States Members, without which there is no United Nations. If we Member States cannot agree on reforms then the United Nations will never be reformed. It is a fact that we have had long discussions without reaching concrete agreements. The time has come to walk the talk.

It is important to remind ourselves that Africa is the largest regional group in the United Nations and the only continent that is not represented among the permanent seats on the Security Council. That situation equally overlooks the fact that most discussions in the Security Council concern Africa. We, African leaders and the African Union, have voiced our sentiments and agreed to have two permanent seats with the veto power. We will continue working together based on the agreed Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration, to which we all subscribed. I therefore appeal to Africa to maintain that momentum and solidarity.

My country will continue to support reform of the United Nations, including the Delivering as One initiative, which has been implemented with considerable success in Tanzania since 2007. The Government will continue to support that process, including its continuation in programme countries. The endorsement of that initiative by some members of the Assembly is a clear testimony to the value of the approach. We believe that the 2012 quadrennial comprehensive policy review will take into account those positive achievements.

The United Nations is anchored in the principles of human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democracy. We the Member States must implement what we deliberate and agree upon, otherwise the credibility of the United Nations will be at stake. The Security Council and the General Assembly have adopted many resolutions on Palestinian independence. Tanzania applauds the admission of the Palestinian State to UNESCO. As we do so, Tanzania would like once again to appeal to the major Powers and donors in UNESCO to review their decision to punish UNESCO by withdrawing their contributions. That decision impacts more on developing countries, in particular African countries, which draw on up to 65 per cent of UNESCO funds in education, science and culture.

With regard to Western Sahara, Tanzania calls upon the Secretary-General to continue his mediation efforts in bringing together the Government of Morocco and the leadership of Western Sahara to resolve the longstanding crisis. In that regard, my delegation encourages Morocco to rejoin the AU so that together we can find a durable solution on the independence of Western Sahara.

Tanzania remains troubled by applications of unilateral sanctions and embargos imposed against Cuba and its people. As President Kikwete said at the previous session of the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.15), Tanzania is in full solidarity with the people of Cuba in demanding the end to all unilateral sanctions and embargos against them.

We Member States have the duty and responsibility to make the world a better place. We should maintain the sanctity of humankind before our ambitions and desires. In order to achieve that, we should recommit ourselves to and uphold the objectives and principles contained in the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (resolution 2625 (XXV)).

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Djibrill Ypènè Bassolé, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Bassolé (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): It is always a very significant moment for the delegation of Burkina Faso when we find ourselves present at this traditional meeting that opens the annual session of the General Assembly. For us, it is a special moment for reflection on how the world is progressing and for sketching ways to build a world of peace, security and solidarity. The sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly is taking place in an atmosphere of uncertainty related to the very difficult international economic situation and the growing threats to international peace and security. The challenges that the situation poses to world require of us greater courage, effort, creativity and solidarity, if all of us wish one day to achieve the objectives of peace and development so dear to the international community.

This year, Burkina Faso has been tested by a food crisis resulting from poor rainfall. The grain and cereal shortage was exacerbated by a massive inflow of tens of thousands of refugees from neighbouring Mali, sometimes with all of their cattle, as a result of the crisis that has raged in that brother country since 17 January. The situation has led the Government of Burkina Faso to undertake vigorous and urgent measures that have enabled us to contain its negative impact on the most vulnerable strata of society and welcome our brothers and sisters from Mali in acceptable human conditions. I should like to reiterate the gratitude of the Government and the people of Burkina Faso to the relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations systems, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Republic of China (Taiwan), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Japan, Tunisia, Egypt and Azerbaijan, who have lent us their assistance to ensure that refugees and worst-off populations of Burkina Faso are able to live dignified lives.

At the political level, Burkina Faso, within the framework of the implementation of the conclusions of the Consultative Council on Political Reforms, is continuing the strengthening and consolidation of its democratic process. Following the successful holding of a biometric registration effort covering the entire national territory, December of this year will witness the organization of joint legislative and municipal elections on the basis of greater transparency and fairness.

Turning to the economy, Burkina Faso is continuing its policy of building a strong and prosperous economy to serve the basic needs of its population. To do that, we have adopted a strategy of accelerated growth and sustainable development to fulfil our drive for progress towards becoming an emerging country and enabling it to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We welcome the backing of Burkina Faso's partners for that strategy, whose ultimate goal is to achieve strong and sustained economic growth that serves to multiplies revenue and improves the population's quality of life, while taking into account the guiding principles of sustainable management of natural resources.

The annual foreign financing needs of the strategy remain significant, despite the efforts undertaken by the Government of Burkina Faso on the basis of our own resources. We are hopeful that our bilateral and multilateral partners, as they have done in the past, will be at our side to ensure a successful implementation of the strategy. We wish to convey our gratitude to those that have already demonstrated their solidarity with us.

Burkina Faso is aware that there can be no sustainable development without peace and stability. That is why President Blaise Compaoré has turned dialogue and mediation into new levers for the maintenance of harmony and understanding among peoples. We are very grateful to President Vuk Jeremić for having placed this session of the General Assembly under the banner, "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". That theme underscores the importance of resorting to peaceful means as an appropriate mechanism for the settlement of disputes. Burkina Faso fully associates itself with the choice of that topic which, following on the sixty-sixth session, will enable the international community to deepen its thinking and commit itself resolutely to the peaceful settlement of conflicts through dialogue to avoid stalemate and the escalation of violence, which reduces to nought our efforts aimed at promoting sustainable economic and social development.

It is along those lines that the President of Burkina Faso has accepted the mediation mission that its peers from the Economic Community of West African States have entrusted him within the framework of the crisis in Mali. The ECOWAS mediation, whose goal is to resolve, through dialogue, the dual institutional and security crisis that is raging in Mali, has focused its efforts on restoring the normal constitutional order and to setting up stable transition bodies that are accepted by Malians and recognized by the international community in order to implement the road map contained in the framework agreement of 6 April, which deals with the management of the crisis and the organization of elections. Burkina Faso will continue to work under the ECOWAS framework, with the support of the international community, towards Mali's reunification and reconciliation so as to create conditions conducive to the holding of free and democratic elections throughout all of Mali.

The establishment of stable and lasting peace in Mali will require a comprehensive approach combining political dialogue and the use of force mainly aimed at neutralizing extremist terrorist groups of a transnational nature, whose presence in the north of Mali is likely to irretrievably compromise efforts aimed at better governance and social and economic development. The President of Burkina Faso, with the assistance of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, will continue in a clear-headed way to seek solutions to the deep-rooted causes of the crisis undermining our subregion, a crisis which the armed rebellion has but exacerbated. I therefore call upon the Malian armed movements to renounce the systematic use of arms as a means to achieve their demands. I urge them to respect the fundamental freedoms of their fellow citizens and to clearly distance themselves from extremist and terrorist movements in order to promote the values of dialogue and democracy to which Mali is so wedded.

The crisis situation in the north of Mali is a tangible manifestation of the type of threat facing all of the countries of the Sahel region. I therefore welcome the timely initiative of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that brought us together on 26 September on the margins of the General Assembly around the issue of peace, security and development in the States of the Sahel region. I renew my gratitude and reiterate to him the regard and appreciation of the Government of Burkina Faso for his availability and commitment to peace and development in Africa and throughout the world.

Always working for international peace and security, Burkina Faso contributes to peacekeeping operations in Darfur and Guinea-Bissau. On Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso encourages the efforts undertaken by the transitional bodies to quickly restore constitutional order and urges all of the country's stakeholders to ensure a consensual and inclusive transition and to create the best possible conditions in which to implement priority reforms, organize free and transparent presidential elections and entrench the rule of law. On Darfur, we encourage the parties to better implement the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, and we continue to contribute through the implementation and follow-up mechanism provided for by the Doha Document.

On the issue of the Western Sahara, Burkina Faso welcomes the determination of the parties to explore appropriate ways and means to achieve a fair and agreed political settlement of the issue. The current status quo is neither viable nor of benefit to any of the parties, given its impact on the subregion's peace and security. That is why my country has continuously promoted dialogue and compromise aimed at achieving an acceptable political solution between the parties. In that regard, we believe that the Moroccan initiative for the negotiation of an autonomous status for the Saharan region could be an appropriate way to settle differences.

The world is experiencing great uncertainty and anxiety as a result of the international economic and financial instability, the increase in poverty, ongoing environmental degradation and the increase in natural disasters. In particular, the recent international financial crises, which seriously compromised the balance of our economies, are sorely testing the cohesion of our societies. They have an impact on all of us and require of us constant vigilance and sustained solidarity.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held from 18 to 22 June in Brazil, rightly reminded us of our shared but differentiated responsibilities to protect our planet and to ensure sustainable development for future generations. It is essential that efforts continue on the basis of the consensus reached at the Conference in order to find acceptable compromises that take into account the interests of the various regions of the world.

Burkina Faso attaches special importance to all issues related to the empowerment of women. To that end, we have spared no effort to improve women's legal and social status in our country. The First Lady of Burkina Faso, Mrs. Chantal Compaoré, Goodwill Ambassador and Coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Female Genital Mutilation Worldwide, co-chaired during this session the high-level side event on banning female genital mutilation. That is yet another demonstration of her well-known commitment to the defence of women's rights and the improvement of the status of women. In that connection, we reiterate our full support for the African initiative to introduce at this session a draft resolution aimed at a global ban on female genital mutilation. We hope that it will enjoy the support of the entire international community.

Furthermore, we welcome efforts undertaken since the launch of UN-Women and we hope that this new body will strengthen United Nations activities aimed at the empowerment of women, the defence of their rights and the promotion of gender equality, especially in developing countries.

Burkina Faso believes in multilateralism, solidarity between peoples and the virtue of dialogue among nations. In that regard, my delegation notes with great satisfaction the calm atmosphere that currently prevails in the relations between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the People's Republic of China. That would argue in favour of granting the Republic of China its rightful place among the family of nations, including through its meaningful participation in the activities of international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The nature of the threats and challenges facing the world demands of us a better sharing of responsibilities through a reform of the United Nations. Such reform remains a topic of great concern at the very heart of global governance. We hope that the negotiations launched within the framework of this reform will result in acceptable compromises that can strengthen the effectiveness and standing of the United Nations as it faces the new challenges of our changing world. Only in that way will we genuinely move towards building a more fair and united world.

My delegation listened with great interest to the inaugural address by the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, in which he covered all the major issues of concern to today's democratic societies. I would therefore like to congratulate him on his election and welcome the vision with which he would like to endow our common Organization. He can rest assured of our delegation's readiness for full cooperation.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of Qatar, for his efforts during the sixty-sixth session of the Assembly. That session's very welcome results bear witness to the skill and effectiveness with which he led our work.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Mr. Davutoğlu (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to congratulate my dear friend His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I believe that, with his able leadership, he will contribute greatly to the work of the Assembly.

I want to be frank and speak the language of the peoples we all represent. Every year, we all gather here at the United Nations, the embodiment of the human quest for peace, security and international order. We exchange views on the daunting challenges that we all face and express our strong commitment to resolving them. On many matters, we speak as one, yet we often fail to act in unity. We express our commitment to the settlement of frozen conflicts, but there is still no prospect for a solution to many such conflicts.

For instance, we have time and again declared our support for a two-State solution to the question of Palestine and adopted numerous resolutions to that end.

However, we still hope that, one day soon, Palestine will be represented as an equal member in the Assembly.

We also underline the need for a solution to the Nagorno Karabakh issue in accordance with the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Yet there has not been a single step towards the resolution of that problem for the past two decades.

In addition, the problem of Cyprus has remained unresolved for almost half a century. Nearly a decade has passed since the United Nations settlement plan of 2004, which the entire international community endorsed. However, Turkish Cypriots continue to face isolation and an unlawful and unjust embargo as if it were a token of appreciation for their support for the United Nations-led settlement.

My point speaks for itself. We cannot resolve current problems, and each year we find ourselves besieged by ever-increasing new ones. Terrorists continue to strike and take the lives of innocent people, yet we still have no effective international response to, or adequate solidarity against, the scourge of terrorism.

Today, some States employ methods of State violence and brutal oppression with impunity, which costs the lives of innocent citizens whom they are obliged to protect. We firmly believe that human life is sacred and that life is the foremost blessing for any human being, whoever and wherever they are.

However, millions of people live in poverty and under oppression. They are deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, suffering under extreme conditions that no human being should ever have to live under. To soothe our collective conscience, we constantly reiterate our pledges to help alleviate the misery of those people. However, we fall short of matching our words with deeds.

We live in perpetual hope. After all, as human beings, we are the children of hope. For us, every dawn, every sunrise and every spring signifies a new beginning of hope. We yearn for peace and idealize peace. It is the essence of our nature.

Humankind expects from us, the leaders of nations, to move humankind towards real peace. However, we lag far behind in meeting the expectations of our nations and of humankind. If it is not for us to provide relief and give hope to a child living in a refugee camp or in open prisons in certain parts of the world, then what is the chance that we will cultivate real peace? When a child opens his eyes to a world of extreme poverty and oppression in a refugee camp or in the streets of his neighbourhood, or when a parent leaves behind a destroyed house, orphans and widows, how can we prevent them from succumbing to despair and pessimism? If we cannot regard the rights of a person in Syria, Palestine, Somalia, Afghanistan, the Rakhine region or other places as equal to our own, how can we talk about freedom and justice? If fundamental human rights are sacrificed for the sake of power politics and become negotiable in talks among a few nations in the Security Council, how are we to achieve universal human rights and security? If we remain incapable of taking action to preserve the universal principles that the forefathers of the United Nations set out when forming this body, how can we demonstrate to people that the flag of the United Nations represents hope for, and a safeguard of, their destiny? If the use of force is accepted as unlimited; if indiscriminate attacks and collective punishment become weapons in the hands of cruel regimes against their own citizens, as we are currently witnessing every day, day and night, in Syria; if we fail to hear and rise to join the cry of the innocent masses, wherever they are; and if we cannot force such brutal regimes to submit to justice and the rule of law, how are we to maintain international peace and security?

A peaceful world, as the founders of the United Nations envisioned, cannot be established if we remain ineffective in our work against those challenges. Let us not forget: our inability to act becomes a tool in the hands of despots and destructive regimes to demolish cities, towns and villages, massacre their own citizens and make a mockery of the civilized world and the United Nations.

The failure to address humanitarian crises shakes our collective conscience. Worse, however, inaction eventually emboldens oppressors and aggressive regimes and creates evil alliances that perpetuate and commit crimes against humanity. Let us make no mistake: mercy shown to an oppressor is the most merciless act towards people under oppression. If not now, when are we supposed to act in unity? If not the United Nations, who is to lead? If not us, then who will shoulder the responsibility to protect innocent civilians? Let us now imagine that we are in the shoes of those people. How can we even dream about a real future?

We need a strong, efficient and credible United Nations. To that end, we must first tackle the long-outstanding issue of reforming the United Nations to make it fit for its purpose. The working methods and structures of the United Nations are not commensurate with the current realities of the world. The Security Council, with its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security, should become more representative, functional and effective. It has to respond to the real needs of the world. That is the only way that it will remain relevant to the enormous challenges that we all face in the twenty-first century.

I can freely appeal to the Assembly's conscience, as Turkey has a solid record — be it in Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Libya or Bosnia and Herzegovina or when it comes to cooperation with least developed countries, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Mediation for Peace initiative, among other examples.

Allow me now to briefly touch upon some specific issues that continue to pose formidable challenges for the international community.

Let me start by underlining that the recent attacks against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad — peace be upon him — and Islam are outright provocations. They aim to pit nations and peoples against each other. We deplore in the strongest terms the malicious attempts to denigrate the most sacred values of Islam or any other faith. We condemn any type of incitement to hatred and religious discrimination against Muslims and people of other faiths.

Unfortunately, Islamophobia has become a new form of racism. It can no longer be tolerated under the guise of freedom of expression. Freedom does not mean anarchy. It means responsibility. The purpose of Islamophobia is clear and simple. It aims to create an abstract and imaginary enemy out of the millions of peace-loving Muslims all over the world. Regretfully, accepting generalities, stereotypes and prejudice as truth, many people unknowingly become Islamophobic. However, no agenda, no provocation, no attack and no incitement to hatred can darken the bright face of Islam.

At the same time, we condemn all the provocations and violence that have led to the loss of lives in many countries, including the death of the United States Ambassador in Libya. I express our sincere condolences for all who have lost their lives. Violence against innocent people cannot be justified under any pretext. Any such activity, no matter whom it is carried out by or for what purpose, is a betrayal against the soul, spirit and letter of Islam.

However, the recent events are testament to a more serious problem that should concern not just Muslims, but the adherents of all faiths and religions. The alarming increase in the number of acts that defame religions, and thereby people who adhere to them, now have serious implications for international peace and security. The time has therefore come to establish the denigration of any religion and its followers as a hate crime. We have to take swift measures. We cannot, and we shall not, leave our future vulnerable to the reckless provocations of all sorts of extremists.

We need to craft a universal policy and a legal instrument that, while protecting free expression, also ensure respect for religion and prevent intentional insults against anyone's faith. The solution should not be arbitrary. It has to focus on those who defame a faith with the intention of inciting discrimination, hostility or violence. We have to find a balance between protecting the rights of an individual or group to free expression and protecting the right of another individual or group not to become the target of hatred or of emotional, incited or psychological violence.

Therefore, from this rostrum, I would like to make a strong appeal to the members of the international community to set up all the necessary instruments to combat all hate crimes, including the denigration of religions and defamation of their followers. The United Nations must lead that effort and should provide the international legal framework to that end. We are resolved to actively pursue this objective and to work diligently with like-minded nations and international organizations to ensure that we take a united and effective stance against Islamophobia and all forms of hate.

Moreover, we are well aware of the need to ensure the safety, security and protection of diplomats. In the past four decade, the Turkish nation has lost 33 diplomats to terrorist acts by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia. We encourage the United Nations to focus on a new understanding of, and international instrument for, the protection of diplomats.

As a mockery of the values we all share, the people of Syria have continued to suffer under the brutality and tyranny of the regime in Damascus for the past 18 months. The numbers speak volumes. More than 30,000 people have been killed so far, approximately 300,000 Syrian refugees have fled to neighboring countries, including Turkey, and more than 1 million people are internally displaced.

Unfortunately, this humanitarian tragedy has become just a statistic for many. What has the international community done to stop this carnage? Literally nothing. We have yet to see a single effective action to save innocent lives. It is a great disgrace to witness that today, after 20 years, the ghosts of Srebrenica and Halabja continue to haunt us, this time in the cities of Syria.

One can argue about the reasons for the failure of the Security Council to stop the violence of the Syrian regime. However, there can be no legitimate explanation for the failure of the Security Council to reflect the collective conscience of the international community. It has to uphold its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. It is the inability of the Council to act that continues to encourage the Syrian regime to kill ever more people.

If the Security Council does not follow the conscience of the international community, as reflected by the resolutions adopted by a more than two-thirds majority of the General Assembly, who will respond to the cries of the Syrian people? For how long will we, the international community, allow this humanitarian tragedy to continue?

The responsibility to protect the people of Syria is our fundamental duty. No political differences, no balance of power politics and no geopolitical considerations should prevail over our conscience and our concern for the destiny of the Syrian people.

More important, the situation in Syria has evolved into a real threat to regional peace and security. The Syrian regime deploys every possible instrument to turn the legitimate struggle of the Syrian people into a sectarian war, which will engulf the entire region in flames. Unfortunately, the longer the regime is allowed to wage its campaign of violence, the harder it will be to prevent such a dreadful eventuality.

It is high time that the Security Council take action, as the Assembly called for. There has to be a solution to ensure the immediate safety and security of the Syrian people. There has to be a solution for a sound transition process that paves the way for the creation of a new and democratic Syria. The regime in power has to step down and allow an interim Government to lead the country to free and fair elections. The Syrian people need our united support and solidarity in their struggle for their future and their right to a legitimate and representative Government.

The Turkish nation stands by its brethren, the Syrian people, in their legitimate struggle. We now care for 90,000 displaced Syrian refugees in Turkish homes. Let me underline once again that, since the beginning of the conflict, we have never hesitated, nor will we ever, hesitate to be at the side of our Syrian brothers and sisters in their most difficult hour.

Another tragedy that has long been taking place before our eyes in the Middle East is that of Palestine. This is the fourth General Assembly session where we continue to stress the unacceptability and unsustainability of the situation in Gaza. However, to date, there has been no progress. As a result, in the fourth year of the unlawful blockade by Israel, the people in Gaza, children in particular, continue to live in despair, desolation and fear.

Many decisions and resolutions have been adopted at the United Nations calling for the lifting of that unlawful blockade. However, Israel persists in its illegal policy to this day, thereby causing misery and anguish in Gaza. In fact, we see the same attitude by Israel in all of the occupied Palestinian territories. Despite insistent calls by the international community, it carries on with its illegal settlements in Palestine, and thus deliberately undermines the prospects of a peaceful two-State solution.

Indeed, when President Mahmoud Abbas spoke in the Assembly last year (see A/66/PV. 19) and declared the right of Palestine to be recognized as an independent State, I remember seeing the whole Assembly in a standing ovation. But as of this day we have yet to see the State of Palestine as an equal member of the General Assembly, with the flag of the independent Palestine flying. How can we convince the Palestinian people that the international community is serious about a two-State solution when no United Nations resolutions have helped their cause for an independent State of Palestine? However, we will one day see the flag of Palestine in the Hall. Turkey will certainly support the Palestinian people in their quest for statehood, dignity and peace.

While the whole world's attention is rightly focused on the Middle East, we should not forget that there are serious human tragedies taking place elsewhere as well. We do not have the luxury to turn a blind eye to any human suffering.

As I personally witnessed during my visit in June, the people of the Rakhine region, especially the Rohingya Muslims, are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. The democratization process under way in Myanmar provides us with a window of opportunity, as the Government has repeatedly stressed its readiness to cooperate with the international community to ease the suffering of those people.

Before concluding my remarks, I wish to touch upon yet another long-standing conflict that also requires immediate practical steps towards a fair and lasting solution. I am referring to the problem of Cyprus. Unfortunately, the new round of talks started in 2008 are at a stalemate, with no end in sight, due to Greek Cypriots' intransigence and lack of political will. Today, despite half a century's experience and a body of United Nations work, there is still not a clear prospect for a solution.

The Turkish Cypriots have so far proven their firm commitment to a negotiated solution, but remain subject to an inhumane and unlawful embargo. That is simply unfair. They should not be forced to play this game for an indefinite period without a clear perspective and timeline for a solution.

The international community must not remain indifferent to what is happening in Cyprus, either. After all, the continuation of the problem creates additional risks for the stability of the region. Moreover, the unilateral exploration of oil and natural gas by the Greek Cypriots around the island further intensifies those risks.

Under those circumstances, the United Nations must do more than what it is currently doing. The Security Council in particular has to facilitate a solution rather than merely sustaining the status quo. A change of mentality is essential. There should be a distinction between those who seek and aspire for a solution and those who reject it. It is no longer enough to pay lip service to a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. It is time to act before it is too late.

In conclusion, I wish to go back to what I said at the beginning of my remarks. We are at the end of the opening of yet another session of the General Assembly. We have all expressed our desire for and commitment to a more peaceful and prosperous world. However, positive change can only be realized if our actions match our words and promises. Every attempt to achieve our objective for real peace, every moment we spend to uphold rightness and justice and every effort we make for freedoms and human rights will provide greater comfort for those who struggle to have a say in their destiny. A while ago, I asked if not now, when? This year, let us make a difference and let us hope that we will not repeat the same question next September in the Assembly.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.

United Nations A/67/PV.16

General Assembly
Sixty-seventh session

Official Records

16th plenary meeting
Friday, 28 September 2012, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić .... (Serbia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Touray (Sierra Leone), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Milanović (Croatia): I am pleased to address the Assembly for the first time since assuming the office of Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia.

We live in times of rapid changes, some of which are positive, others deeply troubling. The world is becoming more interconnected, which strengthens economic opportunities and accelerates development. Advances in science and technology are bringing measurable progress for humankind. The profound transformations in North Africa have raised the hopes of people for real democracy and freedom.

However, there is also much that is disturbing. Conflicts in many parts of the world are wreaking havoc on innocent civilians. Our planet is experiencing growing environmental damage. The global financial and economic crisis is still negatively affecting the majority of countries in both the developing and the developed world. International peace and security are under strain from terrorism, extremism, poverty, inequality, human rights abuses and persecution.

In confronting such challenges, Croatia acts in the global arena on the basis of two fundamental tenets. We stand ready to assume our responsibility towards our own citizens and our neighbours in the region and to be a constructive actor in Europe and a reliable partner to all peace-loving countries in the world. We actively promote solidarity with vulnerable groups and communities and with the poor, the needy, the defenceless and the underprivileged. Responsibility and solidarity are two central principles of our engagement in the United Nations in the pursuit of peace and security and in advancing freedom and democracy, protecting human rights, enhancing sustainable development, respecting international law, ensuring equality and social justice and promoting the rule of law.

This year, Croatia marks the twentieth anniversary of its membership of our global Organization. We are grateful to the United Nations for playing an important role in our country's struggle for political independence, international recognition and full territorial integrity. We have great expectations of the United Nations. As a beacon of multilateralism, it provides the only

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universal framework for finding common solutions to international crises and current challenges. However, we must ask ourselves whether the United Nations does enough and what we can do collectively to improve its performance.

We support the United Nations reform process, which seeks to enhance its accountability, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. United, we are stronger than alone. But let me stress something. If each of our countries becomes more democratic, more developed, better run, more stable and more responsible, our combined strength will rise exponentially.

The topic of the general debate, namely, resolving international disputes by peaceful means, is at the very heart of the United Nations. The Organization was built to prevent war and to keep the peace. We highly value the instruments of preventive diplomacy and mediation and other peaceful means of resolving disputes. In particular, we see merit in resorting to the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration and other existing institutions. We ourselves have done so. We agreed to settle the border issue with our neighbour, Slovenia, through arbitration.

However, we must understand that, in the long run, peace cannot be imposed on parties to a dispute. Each situation has its own pace and dynamics. However, there should be no excuse for a lack of genuine effort. Moreover, without a thorough resolution of issues, there can be no room for a true reconciliation process to take place. In that vein, it is reassuring to note that support for the peaceful resolution of disputes comes from many parts of the world, including countries that have opted to use military means to settle disputes with their immediate neighbours in the recent past.

Not everyone, however, shares equal respect for peace and international law. This year has been particularly unfortunate in terms of the efficiency of the United Nations in the area of conflict prevention, mediation and the protection of civilians. We have witnessed appalling events, and thousands of civilian victims have been exposed to heavy arms and the brutality of armed forces and paramilitary groups. The lack of univocal action against the most severe violations of the United Nations Charter is deeply troubling. We must resolutely counter such an obsession with violence and repression. We should not shy away from our responsibilities.

At this juncture, I must strongly condemn the recent killing of the United States Ambassador to Libya. People come from different cultures, legal traditions, historical backgrounds and forms of Government. Violence can never be an acceptable response to freedom of speech.

Like many previous speakers, I stress the importance of keeping strong international attention on Syria. We align ourselves with the position of the European Union on the situation in Syria. We see the need for prompt action on two fronts. The immediate priority is to stop the loss of life on both sides in the conflict, to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to the Syrian people and to support plans for the country's economic and political stabilization. Further fighting and militarization will only exacerbate the suffering and make a peaceful resolution of the crisis more difficult. In addition, we have to remain committed to pursuing a Syrian-led political transition that will meet the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people. Resolving the crisis is our common responsibility. We therefore call unceasingly for the full respect of international law, especially international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law.

There is no peace without justice and there is no justice without the rule of law and without the fight against impunity. We support concepts of human security and the responsibility to protect, as well as their implementation and improvement through an open and constructive dialogue within the framework of the United Nations. We also support the work of the International Criminal Court. Undoubtedly, there are sufficient conflict prevention tools at our disposal. The question remains whether we can muster enough resolve to use them.

Syria is the most recent and most striking example of the need for a greater role for preventive diplomacy and mediation in the early phases of a conflict. The later we engage, the more divided we are. Timely prevention is crucial for successful conflict resolution. Prevention is also indispensable for countering other threats that destabilize countries and societies. Let me cite an example. If a country is forced to fight corruption through its law enforcement bodies and the judiciary, that is usually a sign that it is too late, that corruption has already left its corrosive imprint on society. Our goal is to invest efforts aimed at building a society in which corruption is not an endemic phenomenon, in which elected officials in Government structures demonstrate responsibility towards their public office. That in turn encourages citizens to foster a corruption-free culture through their daily behaviour. When leaders lead by positive example, people tend to follow. That is because culture flows from structure. That is also the reason why, at the level of the United Nations, we provide our full support to the implementation, wider acceptance and universalization of international legal instruments on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, countering terrorism and preventing corruption.

The global economic crisis combined with the effects of globalization has contributed to the rise of popular distrust in the capability of political leaders to deliver needed solutions. That calls for greater responsibility, better governance and stronger cooperation among States, civil society and the private sector. The Croatian Government has made notable progress in making its work more transparent and more available to its citizens. As a member of the Open Government Partnership initiative, we have become active in the fields of fiscal transparency, access to information, information technology and civil society participation. We are pleased to host the Second European Outreach and Support Meeting of the Initiative on 4 and 5 October in Dubrovnik, where we expect to see the sharing of best practices and further promotion of cooperation between Governments and civil society organizations.

Croatia has undergone an extensive but successful political, economic and social transition in a fairly short period of time. For that reason, we have a special understanding and first-hand experience of the interwoven nature of peace, security, development and the promotion and protection of human rights. Today we are sharing our knowledge and experiences with countries in the region of South-Eastern Europe and with countries emerging from crises, where our post-conflict understanding in nation- and institution-building is particularly relevant.

Croatia is currently a Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission. My country stands ready to assume its responsibility for creating more relevant, better-performing and more empowered peacebuilding structures. Croatia has already joined the Civilian Capacity Project's CAPMATCH initiative designed to address the State-building needs of fragile and conflict-affected countries by offering our help in various fields of expertise gained through our own political transition, post-conflict rehabilitation and unique European Union accession process. Promotion and protection of human rights at the universal level remains one of the cornerstones of the role of the United Nations in the world. Further development of the capacity of the Human Rights Council is of the utmost importance if we are to address seriously and efficiently urgent human rights situations and crises.

We give special attention to continually improving the degree of respect accorded the fundamental human rights of women and girls in different post-conflict societies. Women and children do not have armies to protect them or trade unions to negotiate on their behalf. Yet, more and more women are becoming the primary breadwinners in their families. The empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in societies are prerequisites for security, economic opportunity, effective governance and social development. Croatia will also continue with its active contribution to the work of the United Nations human rights forums, in particular safeguarding the rights of vulnerable members of society, such as lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgendered persons, promoting the moratorium on the use of death penalty and ensuring the right to conscientious objection to military service.

In times of economic uncertainty, be it due to financial crisis or long-term poverty, some tend to downplay the importance of human rights or of consolidating democracy. Every day we witness the sad realities of starving children, deaths from preventable communicable diseases, inadequate education and health systems, and the continuous degradation of the ecosystem. Challenges we are facing require integrated solutions across interconnected issues and the further strengthening of the multilateral architecture. We welcome the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and encourage its follow-up process. We look forward to more energetic work on the implementation of sustainable development goals, which should complement existing commitments and encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development — economic, social and environmental — in a balanced and synergistic way. Croatia sees the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies as a cornerstone for the achievement of balanced integration of sustainable development.

Croatia is firmly devoted to participation in those processes, in particular in the fields of education and gender equality. Education is a sector which builds a firm foundation for responding to the challenges of pursuing a post-2015 development framework.

Therefore, Croatia salutes the launching of the Secretary-General's Education First initiative and is pleased that the Croatian President has been invited to join the steering group known as the Group of Member State Champions.

I have already mentioned Croatia's successful post-conflict transition. In addition to having joined NATO since 2009, Croatia will become the twenty-eighth member of the European Union (EU) next year. Our international engagement is visible and strong. Croatia has been an active participant in United Nations peacekeeping missions, and I praise our women and men who have risked their lives for the common good. We have been providing substantial contributions to international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and improve the living conditions of its people, highlighting the need for the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of women and children. Croatia is also actively participating in EU meetings at a time when the Union is intensively trying to find ways of overcoming the crisis and assuming its rightful place in the world.

Let me emphasize that Croatia greatly appreciates the role that the EU has been playing in the United Nations as a significant and positive force behind a number of initiatives. At the same time, for Croatia, the process of EU accession was primarily an exercise in institution-building and State transition. We built a stronger State so we can play a more substantive role in world affairs.

The perspective of EU membership has proved to be the main motivator and catalyst for social and political reforms. We want our neighbours in South-Eastern Europe to undertake the same demanding but rewarding road. We do not intend to assume a mentoring role in the region, but we stand ready to share our experiences and contribute constructively to the reforms in neighbouring countries based on democracy and European values.

A peaceful and prosperous South-Eastern Europe is in Croatia's strategic interest. Our vision is not just a region devoid of war. We strive to achieve genuine political, societal and economic development. We want people, especially young women and men, to have better standards of living and better prospects, to live in a clean environment and in a well-organized State with fully functioning institutions, to speak less about what was and much more about what could be.

That reminds me of a quotation by Croatian public health expert Dr. Andrija Štampar, a man who founded the World Health Organization decades ago, who once said that, "All people, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, have the right to be healthy!" I agree. Only healthy and self-confident people can shape a healthy and progressive society. It is our primary responsibility, individual and collective, to build such a world and bequeath it to our children.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Patrice Emery Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Mr. Patrice Emery Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Patrice Emery Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Trovoada (Sao Tome and Principe) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, on behalf of the Government of Sao Tome and Principe, and in my own name, I would like to congratulate Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I am convinced that his experience as Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia will be a most positive contribution to strengthening the affirmation of the principles of the United Nations Charter for world security and peace, and I trust that he will lead the work of this session with clarity and balance.

The Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe also wishes to express its great appreciation for the work of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and for his role in expanding our Organization and encouraging it to continue its efforts to achieve the objectives of world peace and security. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his highly positive contribution during the sixty-sixth session.

As it did during the debates of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe reiterates its hope that the United Nations will play a key role in mediating international conflicts. Unfortunately, today we continue to look on with concern as conflicts that could jeopardize international peace and security persist and further exacerbate the deep economic and financial crisis that is devastating the world. Sadly, our Organization continues to suffer from roadblocks that prevent urgent decisions from being taken and that undermine this forum's credibility. That inaction translates into impunity for leaders who martyrize their own peoples, paving the way for more international disorder, despair and the sentiment of injustice that is experienced when peoples receive unequal treatment.

We need no further evidence of the urgency for in-depth reforms of our Organization, primarily the Security Council, than our inability to put an end to the horrific images of children, symbols of purity and innocence, who are killed daily in Syria, to prevent the destruction of the world's historic and cultural heritage, as by gangs of destructive criminals in Mali and in Afghanistan, and to forestall coups d'état or obvious attempts to destabilize States and democratically elected Governments that in fact solve nothing and irreparably delay the lengthy process of building democracy and fighting poverty.

We must prevent the disintegration of territories and remedy the abnormal and degrading situations of peoples who have already suffered from the poverty and exclusion created by a lack of democratic leadership or of effective and democratic rule of law. In the specific case of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, with which Sao Tome and Principe maintains deeply rooted historic, cultural and linguistic links, the international community should bring both firmness and persistence to bear in finding a credible, inclusive and lasting solution that will ensure that coups d'état do not recur in that country. To do so necessarily requires a reform of the armed forces as well as a strong warning to the political class as a whole to make a steadfast commitment to respect political dialogue and democratic legality. On our side, we will continue to make efforts, in cooperation with the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries and other engaged regional and international organizations, to guarantee a better future for the people of Guinea-Bissau.

Regarding the occupation of the north of the Republic of Mali by groups of terrorists and the persistent conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sao Tome and Principe acknowledges and applauds the efforts the international community has made through the United Nations and the African Union to establish peace, security and stability. However, it seems that it is becoming increasingly essential for us to ask the States that share borders with those two African countries to establish more effective, intelligent and effective ways to cooperate, based on trust and on a matrix of mutually beneficial and realistic economic interests.

It is common knowledge that the forces of destabilization, despair and terror are fuelled and furthered by differences and distrust between States, which in turn paralyses the international decision-making process. However, we must point out positive signs in the trends of a few conflicts on the African continent, such as the cases of the Republics of the Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia. Consequently, we cannot fail to applaud the recent agreement signed by the Republic of the Sudan and South Sudan. Through that framework, the two countries will be able to live in peace and harmony. We also welcome the positive role of the African Union Mission in Somalia, which paves the way to returning the political, economic and social situation of that country and the region to normalcy. Moreover, in our opinion, the important recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on the situation concerning the Western Sahara (S/2012/197) are a positive asset for a permanent resolution.

The social movements that took place in North Africa in 2011, which had the merit of reinstating the right to freedom and democracy for the different peoples, were popular movements that in many cases were mobilized through social networking and modern instruments of technical communication. Various situations of insecurity and reprehensible acts, as well as the acts recently committed in Benghazi of which American diplomats were the victims, raise the issue of how we may live in this new context of the circulation and dissemination of images and information at the global level, in a world that we want to be free, open and tolerant, but in which large segments of the world population still live in a state of extreme poverty, with no access to education and with the growing conviction that they face exclusion and discrimination.

How do we deal with the offences committed by people, including even some persons with public political responsibilities such as State leaders, who fail to recognize the right of other peoples and States to exist? In that regard, we would like to take the opportunity that this platform affords us to express to the mourning families of diplomats, journalists, members of non-governmental organization and peacekeepers our sincere and deep condolences as well as our unfailing solidarity. Our ongoing obligation to work to build a better world and to invest in education and the promotion of human and democratic values is fundamental, beginning with Member States complying with all United Nations resolutions.

The massacres in Syria must cease, the integrity and security of the State of Israel must be effectively guaranteed, the Palestinian people must have their own State, the embargo against Cuba must end, countries, including Iran, must have the right to civil nuclear technology and must scrupulously observe the commitments that that entails, and polluters must be the principal payers. It must be our ambition, and not a mere hope, to ensure that we return here next year with an agenda that includes fewer of these troublesome issues, many of which are recurring.

We are pleased to note a few positive signs in the dialogue between the Republic of China on Taiwan and the People's Republic of China on the one hand, and, on the other, the willingness of the United States Congress and the European Parliament to admit Taiwan as a member of international organizations. Sao Tome and Principe supports initiatives such as these, which will make it possible for the people of Taiwan to make a significant contribution to international issues without ignoring the necessity for the two parties in the Straits of Formosa to work peacefully to agree to frame and normalize their relations.

The High-level Meeting that preceded the general debate was an excellent opportunity for Member States to share information on how democratic reforms are being implemented and the rule of law strengthened both in individual countries and at the international level. It is very pleasing that this discussion is leading to significant progress in implementing the democratic and institutional reforms that can help to strengthen the rule of law, internally and internationally. In that regard, Sao Tome and Principe congratulates the Republic of Angola on its recent successful and transparent general elections, since they also constitute another step towards strengthening the democratic process in its sister country of Sao Tome and Principe.

Threats to our global security, particularly transnational crimes such as piracy and the trafficking and sale of arms and drugs, are a matter of great concern for Sao Tome and Principe, a country with a long coastline located in the Gulf of Guinea. Such events are threats that we cannot ignore; they demand that we cooperate as closely as possible both with the States we share the coastline with and the other partners and organizations that have experience in dealing with such issues, and adopt mechanisms — which we resolve to strengthen — for preventing, managing and resolving conflicts caused by organized crime in order to improve our collective security.

In that context, we applaud the important resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) adopted by the Security Council on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea. As part of the Gulf of Guinea region, we repeat our firm pledge to do everything we can, jointly with our partners, to prevent that region, rich as it is in raw materials of strategic importance to industrialized economies, from becoming a stage for maritime piracy and other scourges that hinder economic trade, peace and security in the region. To that end, we reiterate that we are absolutely ready and willing to help implement initiatives to hold an international summit on maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

The substantial transformations that have occurred in the international political arena as a result of the grave global financial crisis have forced the citizens of small States, and of Sao Tome and Principe in particular, to make major sacrifices. In that regard, Sao Tome and Principe believes that the continuing international and economic financial crisis and its effects on the economies of small countries, which have included reductions and slowdowns in official international aid, tend to threaten social cohesion as well as previous improvements in fiscal discipline, the business climate and political stability itself. The acceptability of controlling and reducing public deficits in developing countries such as ours is reaching its limits where our citizens are concerned, and good governance now demands measures that can effectively jump-start our economies through productive investments.

We believe that the most vulnerable populations, in both the northern and southern hemispheres of our planet, are demanding changes in the practices and rules of the international financial system, and new world financial governance that is better able to hold accountable the financial stakeholders and speculators who undermine the efforts of Governments and their peoples to develop economies that bring progress.

Internally, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe is making efforts to reduce poverty and increase transparency in public management and economic growth. Institutional reforms in the areas of public finance, justice and national defence, whose purpose is to strengthen the capacities of our democratic institutions and develop the country, have been progressing at a good pace. Regarding the Millennium Development Goals, for which the United Nations has set a deadline of 2015, the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe can report significant progress, particularly in the areas of education, with a literacy rate of 92 per cent of the population, and health, especially in the fight against malaria. However, we realize that meeting the deadline will require further effort.

To achieve those goals, our country hopes to continue to receive support in many forms from the international community. In that regard, I would like to take this opportunity to extend the sincere thanks of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe to the entire international community, and in particular UNESCO and all of its member States, for designating the island of Principe a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, thus recognizing and providing further incentives for our efforts to defend and preserve the environment.

I would like to conclude by repeating that the Government of Sao Tome and Principe, which I have the honour of representing, stands ready and willing to take part in efforts to mobilize the will and synergy needed to achieve the honourable goals that guided the creation of the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Patrice Emery Trovoada, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Desalegn (Ethiopia): I would like to congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, and to thank him for the inspiring speech he made at the opening of the general debate (see A/67/PV.6). We are confident that the spirit exemplified in that speech will guide him during his presidency. Let me also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the outgoing President.

The reason I am here on this rostrum, making my maiden speech to the General Assembly as Head of Government of the new Ethiopia, is because we lost our leader only a little more than a month ago. The passing of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is a huge loss for Ethiopia, and undoubtedly for Africa as well. He was a man of prodigious intellect who was uncompromising in his insistence that Ethiopians and Africans should own and protect their development strategies and their approaches to governance and democratization. The late Ethiopian Prime Minister, and the party he led, have facilitated the emergence of a new Ethiopia, rekindling the hopes of Ethiopians for the future and strengthening their confidence in their ability to overcome adversity.

Ethiopians proved their mettle, and what they are made of, when they received the unexpected news of the tragedy with which the nation was faced. It is an honour and a blessing to be the leader of a people who are generous in paying tribute to those, like Prime Minister Meles, who served them selflessly; a people who have the maturity and wisdom to see, and even lucidly articulate, who has done what for the nation and for the people of Ethiopia. That would naturally make any human being who is given the opportunity to lead a country ask himself what more he can do for his people — not in words but in deeds, as our late Prime Minister often emphasized. As might be expected, doomsday scenarios for Ethiopia's future were bandied about.

But the people of Ethiopia — from north to south, from east to west, across the length and breadth of the country — were categorical in stating in unison how much they embrace the unity of the country, unity that celebrates their diversity and is built on the bedrock of their federal Constitution. Let me take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the Ethiopian people and myself, all those leaders and heads of delegation who came to Addis Ababa to be with us at our time of grief. We cherish your friendship. I wish to reiterate my condolences to the peoples and Governments of Ghana, Malawi and Guinea-Bissau, who have also lost their leaders recently.

We Ethiopians are confident that we have come a long way. Never before in its modern history has Ethiopia had the kind of rapid economic growth that it has witnessed over the last decade or so. Indeed, for the first time in its modern history, Ethiopia has begun to see a bright light at the end of the tunnel in terms of real prospects for economic transformation. We are, for sure, on a hugely promising trajectory. Our Growth and Transformation Plan, to which our late Prime Minister was devoted, and which is now embraced by our people, is designed to catapult our nation to a destination thathas long eluded it but is now within reach.

We go forward with full recognition of our responsibility, as the second most populous country in Africa, to contribute to regional integration. We foresee huge possibilities for bringing the countries of the greater Horn of Africa together. We have already gone some distance in playing a catalytic role in laying the infrastructural basis for consolidating economic ties with the countries of our region. The electric power interconnections and the road and railway networks that we have built and are in the process of building with Djibouti, the Sudan, Kenya and South Sudan are emblematic of our resolve to play our part in regional integration. We are confident that Somalia and others, without exception, will follow suit.

But our success hinges on a number of conditions being met, none of which is amenable to our unilateral initiative. First is the question of peace and stability and the challenge of extremism. Here, also, we have made much progress. Somalia is gradually coming out of the woods. We salute all those, most particularly the contributors of troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia, for the sacrifice they have made. The African Union (AU) has made an enormous contribution to laying the basis for the progress that Somalia has made. We also acknowledge the very useful cooperation between the AU and the United Nations, including their two Councils responsible for security. We have to recognize the role of partners as well. But much more needs to be done in Somalia to ensure that the new Government stands on its own feet. We would be naive, however, if we believed that the enemies of peace of Somalia and the region are completely defeated. That is why it is so critical that the momentum is not lost in Somalia and Somalia's ownership of the process of national reconciliation is strengthened. We will continue to assist Somalia and the new President of the country, Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and the people of Somalia can count on that.

We are pleased that there is also major progress in the peace process between the Sudan and South Sudan. We are confident that the two parties will maintain the momentum towards durable peace, which is the basis for ensuring the viability of both. We are indeed indebted to former President Thabo Mbeki and the African Union High-level Implementation Panel for their perseverance and commitment to peace between the two sisterly countries. What has been achieved by the two parties over the last few days, which culminated in the signing of the much anticipated agreements on vital matters, is a significant breakthrough, which needs to be consolidated and used as a basis for resolving the issues still remaining. We are confident that the two parties appreciate how vital their joint effort for a win-win outcome is, not only for their peoples, but also for us all.

Peace between the Sudan and South Sudan and a close partnership between the two, above and beyond the benefit it has for us all, has for us Ethiopians an additional emotional and sentimental value. That was an issue that our late Prime Minister, even as he was struggling for his life, was following with the same intensity as before, and he continued to offer whatever added value he could bring to bear on the peace process. Let me thank both the Sudan and South Sudan for placing their trust in us, as has been so manifest in the deployment of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei. Indeed, we are proud of our troops in

Abyei, as we are of all our people serving under the United Nations flag, including those in Darfur.

Before I move on to the second challenge we face, I wish to say a few words on broader issues that help put in perspective the challenge our region faces in securing sustainable peace and stability. The major war we have to win is undoubtedly the war on poverty. The most difficult challenge we face here in developing the most effective means to wage that war is that of ensuring that the rule of law is observed, both in inter-State relations and in the domestic sphere. At its most fundamental level, the struggle against extremism is one aspect of the struggle to ensure that the rule of law is respected and the principles of tolerance are adhered to. Wherever an act of intolerance or a violation of laws occurs, sometimes in an egregious manner, as in Benghazi, it needs to be condemned.

The second challenge we face in sustaining our development agenda relates to a host of issues impinging on our capacity to ensure sustainable development. Let us be frank and admit that there is a huge deficit in international cooperation for the development of both low-income and least developed countries. At the end of the day, regardless of other impediments to development, the major bottleneck for countries such as Ethiopia for ensuring sustainable development and successfully achieving the Millennium Development Goals is related to shortfalls in development finance. We said as much in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action, and, recently, in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, but the results have been few and far between. In our view, the current global economic situation should never be allowed to detract attention from the critical need for development finance of low-income countries.

The challenge in this area is compounded and made even worse by climate change, which is a global challenge calling for responsible and wise leadership at the international level. The response should rely on full commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. However boring it may be, something that is universally acknowledged bears repeating. Countries such as Ethiopia which did not contribute to climate change are nonetheless those most affected by it. But, still, we recognize our obligation. That is why Ethiopia has already opted for a green growth path, and our current five-year Growth and Transformation Plan is based on developing a green economy, the strategy for which has already been issued and is being implemented. We seek effective cooperation in this endeavour.

We had hoped that the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development would achieve more than it did. Nevertheless, we look forward to meaningful and effective work by the working group on sustainable development, to which we are ready to contribute as best we can. We are also hopeful that the intergovernmental process under the auspices of the General Assembly in connection with financing for development will not turn into a filibustering exercise without any impact on this issue, which is so critical for the development of low-income countries.

As I conclude, I wish to express my agreement with previous speakers that the twenty-first century is indeed an African century. As mentioned by my brother, the President of Ghana, out of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world last year, six were African countries. I should also mention that Ethiopia was among the six. Africa is indeed changing, and changing for the better. There is no greater human rights violation than attempts to put obstacles in the way of the success of the ongoing transformations of Africa, which will have enormous salutary implications for hundreds of millions of Africans.

Africa is no longer the marginalized continent of the 1980s or even of the period a little later than that. Ethiopia will continue to play its part to ensure the success of the transformation and the success of multilateralism under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco.

His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Prince Moulay Rachid (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): His Majesty King Mohammed VI asked me to convey his appreciation and respect, and I am pleased to read my speech at the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

First, I would like to warmly congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, on his election. That election is a mark of esteem for the friendly country of Serbia as much as it is a recognition of the vast diplomatic experience he brings to the presidency.

I also would like to commend Mr. Jeremić's predecessor, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, on his efforts and achievements during the past year.

Similarly, I would like to commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his untiring action and his keen desire to tackle crises. I applaud his initiatives aimed at enabling the United Nations to rise to the growing challenges facing our world.

Sweeping changes are affecting today's international arena. They include, in particular, a protracted global economic crisis that has various implications and consequences. There are also a growing number of hotbeds of tension, political disputes and armed conflicts, as well as complex global challenges that exceed the capabilities of individual States, such as achieving sustainable development, protecting the environment, ensuring respect for human rights and fighting against the growing scourge of international terrorism and all forms of organized crime.

Given the current changes in the world, we, the States Members of the United Nations, ought to provide the Organization with the means it needs to tackle those challenges. To that end, we must expand the scope of the Organization's actions and revitalize its approach, while preserving its principles and purposes, so as to make it an active player in ensuring effective political governance and an instrument for equitable economic governance.

The Kingdom of Morocco fully backs the decision to give special importance to resolving disputes by peaceful means. My country applauds the General Assembly's decision to make the strengtheing of the foremost principle in the Charter of the United Nations the key objective of the current session.

Achieving international peace and security remains the core historic mission entrusted to the United Nations. The tens of thousands of United Nations peacekeepers serving throughout the world to protect civilians and working to bring about the right conditions for political dialogue between the concerned parties clearly attest to the vital role played by our Organization in that regard.

The Kingdom of Morocco takes pride in being one of the first States to have contributed to peacekeeping operations under the United Nations banner. So far, my country has sent more than 50,000 members of the Royal Armed Forces to places around the world to serve in promoting the lofty objectives of the United Nations. Morocco will remain committed to managing crises and will support efforts to promote preventive diplomacy.

The experience gained by the United Nations in conflict-affected countries points to the importance of securing smooth, systematic transition from peace restoration to peace consolidation. That requires, above all, a prompt response to the pressing needs raised by current developments and threats. Otherwise, the threat of a return to violence and partition will continue to hang over the countries and regions concerned.

During the past year, the African continent has seen a serious deterioration in the situation on the continent, particularly in the Sahel and the Sahara regions, owing to criminal, terrorist and separatist activities, which now threaten the stability of the countries concerned.

Our sister nation, the Republic of Mali, is confronted with a situation that threatens the country and its national unity and territorial integrity. Despite the sincere efforts exerted by countries in the region, including Morocco and the Economic Community of West African States, the contribution of the United Nations is also needed in order to achieve national consensus, overcome the political crisis and confront separatist activities in the north. Only an independent, focused effort on the part of the United Nations can help achieve those objectives. I should like, in that respect, to reiterate to our brothers in Mali Morocco's commitment to continue to provide them with aid and active support for the success of the political process and the preservation of their country's national unity and territorial integrity.

At the same time, the Kingdom of Morocco lauds the notable progress made in several parts of Africa, especially in the sister nations of Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, towards the promotion of national reconciliation and a return to political normalcy. Moreover, Morocco reiterates its firm commitment to pursuing cooperation and solidarity programmes with various African sister nations, using efficient, dynamic approaches to South-South cooperation for the benefit of African citizens.

The changes witnessed in the Arab region reflect the will of the peoples involved to build democratic societies where human rights are respected and where citizens enjoy equal opportunities and a dignified life. The peoples in the sister nations of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen have ushered in a new era and have made great headway towards a democratic transition, despite a complex and tumultuous political environment, a fact that makes it incumbent upon the international community to provide support and assistance to those countries to deal with the constraints and difficulties that they face.

It is, on the other hand, most regrettable that the Syrian people are each day paying a daily price in blood for their freedom. They yearn for the kind of democratic change that would enable each component of the Syrian population to contribute to achieving the desired change. Morocco, as the only Arab country sitting on the Security Council, has significantly contributed to mobilizing international support for the League of Arab States' initiatives and resolutions. We call for concerted efforts and decisive action to compel the Syrian regime to put an end to the violence. We also call for a political transition process that would allow for the full spectrum of opinions to be heard, the aspirations of the Syrian people to be fulfilled, and Syria's national unity and territorial integrity, as well as for stability in the entire region, to be ensured.

At the same time, it is necessary to raise the financial resources required to meet the needs of refugees in neighbouring countries and those of internally displaced persons, as well as to ease the suffering of our Syrian brothers and put an end to their tragedy. In that regard, Morocco continues to show its solidarity by providing medical services on a daily basis to Syrian refugees in the sisterly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The rapid developments in the Arab region must not distract us from the fundamental, longstanding challenge of resolving the Palestinian issue. In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco calls for the mobilization of international support to back the steps taken by the Palestinian National Authority to secure non-member State status. At the same time, my country is of the view that negotiations are the best way for the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate national rights and to set up an independent, fully viable and geographically contiguous Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, in peace and security. I therefore look forward to seeing the international community change its approach to resolving that crisis by reconsidering its intervention mechanisms and work methods in order to ensure that direct negotiations are resumed very soon and in the best possible circumstances, under the auspices and with the commitment of the influential Powers.

That cannot be achieved if the fait accompli policy is allowed to continue. In that regard and in my capacity as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, I have strongly condemned the Israeli plan for the Judaization of occupied East Jerusalem, as well as the Israeli plans to wipe out the city's spiritual and cultural identity and change its demographic and urban features. Let me reaffirm, in that regard, that there can be no peace without East Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state.

Steadfast in its belief in the importance and effectiveness of joint regional action, the Kingdom of Morocco has undertaken initiatives and bilateral contacts to inject fresh momentum into the Arab Maghreb Union. Indeed, my country believes that such a strategic, inclusive regional bloc is urgently needed; not only does it meet the legitimate aspirations of our peoples, but it is also necessitated by the security and development challenges facing the five Maghreb States. In a bid to overcome obstacles that might hinder the realization of that Maghreb ambition, the Kingdom of Morocco has contributed in a sincere, dedicated manner to negotiations aimed at finding a realistic, mutually acceptable political solution to the artificial regional dispute over the Moroccan Sahara — a solution that would guarantee the Kingdom's national unity and territorial integrity, allow for reunification to take place, and respect the characteristics of the region's populations.

Morocco remains committed and willing to negotiate on the basis of the principles established and repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council, as well as the autonomy initiative, which the international community has deemed serious, realistic and credible. Morocco will also continue to cooperate constructively with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, on the basis of the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council — a mandate that will not change in any way; neither in form nor substance.

I cannot conclude without referring to the need for collective, effective and concerted action against all forms of extremism, hatred, xenophobia, provocation and rejection of those different from us and the undermining of their beliefs, for whatever reason and in whichever form. Given the increase in appalling acts of that kind, often with tragic consequences, I believe national efforts to tackle them must be part of a concerted international strategy that should take into account existing constructive initiatives, build on the mobilization of all United Nations bodies, be based on clear commitments, and encourage law-making and the dissemination of national and regional best practices in that area.

It is up to us as Member States to provide the necessary means and to reiterate our political will to support the Organization and reform its structures and intervention mechanisms. The aim is to enhance its effectiveness in terms of achieving peace and security and promoting cooperation, while enabling it to fulfil its indispensable mission of furthering tolerance and coexistence, for the benefit of all mankind.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, for the statement he has just made.

His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid, Prince of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eamon Gilmore, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the State of Ireland.

Mr. Gilmore (Ireland): The primary mission of the United Nations is to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which... has brought untold sorrow to mankind". Those are the words of the Charter of the United Nations: the legacy of our predecessors. Our history tells us that conflict grows in the spaces where human rights are denied; that, where deprivation, inequality and injustice erode human dignity and potential, conflict is the consequence; that war follows hunger, and hunger follows war. That is why the Charter expresses in simple and clear terms our commitment to fundamental human rights. It reaffirms our "faith in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

Words can at times become too familiar, so familiar that their force and impact fade with time. We who gather here each year must remind ourselves what we stand for, reflect honestly on what we have achieved and what we have not achieved, and rededicate ourselves to the ideals set out in our Charter. We must make those lofty words relevant again to the peoples for whom we speak here.

The struggle for human rights is being fought every day in every region of the world. There are too many forgotten places and forgotten causes. We must not turn away from the dark corners where the media spotlight does not shine or from which the media spotlight has long departed. We must speak here for the five-year-old child, without a family, struggling to survive in a refugee camp; for the hungry mother cradling a dying infant at a feeding station; for those who cannot speak publicly in their own lands and who look to us here for the vindication of their basic rights; for those who believe in the words of our Charter and expect us to act on them.

What is happening in Syria is an affront to humanity. Syrian children, Syrian women and Syrian men, young and old, are being slaughtered by their own Government. A national army — the army of a sovereign State and Member of this Organization — is shelling its own people as they queue for bread, and is launching airstrikes on its own cities. We find compelling evidence of wholesale massacres in towns such as Houla, and we see Syrian children trying to make sense of their shattered lives in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The violence is indiscriminate, and on an appalling scale. And it is not confined to one side.

The people of Syria deserve the full support of the international community for the efforts to bring about an end to their suffering and to achieve an early political transition. Ireland backs the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab Nations, Lakhdar Brahimi, in his difficult task. The priority must be to achieve an immediate ceasefire and to get a political process under way that will facilitate the transition.

What is needed, above all, is a strong Security Council resolution that will authorize targeted sanctions. It must include a comprehensive arms embargo against all those who are responsible for violating the human rights of the Syrian people. That is what the Syrian people want from us, and what they have a right to expect.

There must also be full accountability for human rights abuses. To prevent further atrocities now and to save lives now, we must make it clear now that atrocities will not go unpunished. That is why Ireland supports the call by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and by Switzerland and others for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We are working to build up strong cross-regional support for such a referral.

If the events in the Arab world over the past two years have taught us anything, it is that leaders who deny legitimate demands for greater political and economic freedom and who instead resort to waging war on their own people will inevitably lose the right to rule. The systematic denial of human rights and suppression of democratic liberties has fuelled a profound desire for change. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain and elsewhere, Ireland has supported the will of the people, peacefully expressed, to bring about long-overdue democratic reforms.

As world attention focuses on Syria, peace and justice remain elusive elsewhere in the Middle East. The need for a lasting resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is as urgent as ever. Yet a depressing stalemate persists, with no progress towards a comprehensive settlement. Ireland has said on many occasions that the establishment of a Palestinian State, within borders based on those of 1967, is long overdue. We have made clear our hope that Palestine will be formally admitted to the United Nations as a full Member. While that hope remains to be fulfilled, we welcome the announcement by President Abbas of his plans to consult with the membership of the General Assembly on a resolution that, as an interim step towards the achievement of that goal, would accord Palestine non-member State observer status. Ireland will be proud to support a fair and balanced resolution to that end, and we look forward to the forthcoming consultations.

We know of course that such steps will not alter the situation on the ground. Israel must stop expanding settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which only impede the prospect of achieving Israel's own stated desire for a Palestinian State. The peace and security of the people of Israel, to which they are entitled, gain nothing from denying the basic rights of the people of Gaza, who are subjected to an unjust and counterproductive blockade.

There is no alternative to serious negotiations between the two sides aimed at a comprehensive settlement. I would like to see President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu commit themselves to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement within a specified timescale. That will not be easy and will require painful compromises on both sides. But if both leaders are willing to embark on that path they will have the unstinting support of the entire international community, including Ireland.

Peace and security are inextricably linked to development. And development is at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy. We have maintained our official development assistance above 0.5 per cent of gross national product — an important achievement in the face of major economic difficulties — and we remain committed to reaching the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent as soon as we possibly can.

Ireland's aid programme represents a genuine investment by the Irish people in the world we share with the people of developing countries. We focus in particular on the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. We have prioritized investments in education, in health, in good governance, and in the lives and rights of girls and women and of persons living with HIV and AIDS. We have seen remarkable economic progress made in African countries as a result of such investments. But great inequalities still persist.

It is in all our interests as global citizens to stay the course in relation to the Millennium Development Goals and to continue to work together for a sustainable and just world in which States operate on the basis of the rights of all people to participate in and contribute to society and inclusive economies.

Against that background, the reality of hunger persists in our world. The scandal is that we have the tools to tackle that suffering and that terrible waste of human potential. How can people realize their rights and potential if they cannot meet their most basic needs for existence?

No country knows that better than Somalia. Once, Somalia was at the centre of the world's attention. But the media spotlight moved on, and the people of Somalia have faced a long struggle to emerge from war, famine and instability. Today, more than two million Somalis still need our help. On the last Sunday of July 2012, I visited Mogadishu. Amidst the grinding poverty and the misery of insecurity, I saw genuine signs of hope and opportunity. Schools, homes, shops and businesses are being rebuilt and reopened, and people are returning from exile. Increased international engagement has been essential. Real progress is also being achieved in Somalia's transition to democracy, with impressive engagement by Somali traditional and political leaders. We must support them.

I pledge today that Ireland will not turn away from Somalia or from humanitarian emergencies elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and across the globe. We will work with our partners to highlight forgotten crises and the needs of fragile States, as well as to forge a more coherent and effective international approach towards humanitarian action and development policy.

Ireland has made the fight against hunger and undernourishment the key priority of its development policy. We have delivered on our commitment to direct 20 per cent of our aid budget to that priority. With our partners, we have worked closely with the Secretary-General to build and support the Scaling Up Nutrition movement. But we must do more. Collectively, we must act now to recognize the systemic linkages between recurring food price crises, humanitarian emergencies, chronic undernourishment and the effects of climate change.

There is nothing that connects us more across borders, across oceans and across generations than our mutual dependence on the planet that we share. Climate change is not something happening in a far-off land or in a distant future. It is happening now and it is happening fast. It is not for another generation to solve. It is for us to take responsibility, to strive to achieve climate justice, and to act.

A deep attachment to the safeguarding of human rights has been at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy since the foundation of our State. Ireland's commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights has been shaped by our own history. As a small island nation that has experienced the impact of colonialism, civil war and conflict, we learned the hard way that human rights can never be taken for granted.

From the earliest days of our United Nations membership, we pioneered the promotion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We also paid close attention to decolonization and the struggle against apartheid. Today, we make substantial contributions to United Nations development agencies and funds and are active participants in United Nations peacekeeping operations. Thousands of Irishmen and Irishwomen have served in United Nations peacekeeping forces, and our people are intensely proud of that contribution to the ideals of the United Nations.

Ireland also plays an active role in the work being done in the United Nations framework to protect and promote human rights. We are proud that our former President, Mary Robinson, served with distinction as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002. When the Human Rights Council was first established in 2006, Ireland declared that it would seek election to that body in 2012. That is the first occasion on which we have sought election to the Council.

We are committed to a robust and effective Human Rights Council. We want to see a principled Council that provides real leadership in that critical area. We also value and support the full participation of small States in the work of the Council. The Universal Periodic Review process has opened up an important space for national dialogue on human rights. Ireland engaged constructively and self-critically in its own review. We are also firmly committed to a strengthened United Nations treaty monitoring body system and have actively contributed to efforts to reinforce that system.

Threats to human rights worldwide are proliferating steadily, whether from widespread poverty and hunger, repressive systems of governance, religious intolerance, gender-based violence or other sources. If Ireland is elected to the Human Rights Council in November, we will serve the cause of international human rights protection as an active and committed member of the Council.

The United Nations was founded on the principle that diplomatic engagement and dialogue between nations are essential to peace and human development. Attacks on diplomatic missions, such as we saw recently in Benghazi, are attacks on that principle. They are never acceptable and must be condemned by the international community.

Ireland is currently chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). That has enabled us to make a contribution to the search for agreement across the full range of the OSCE's activities. We have drawn on our own experience in building peace in Northern Ireland to contribute to the work of the OSCE, which seeks to find peaceful settlements to protracted conflicts. I am hopeful that by the end of our term in office we will have been able to make progress in some key areas, including in the so-called human dimension of the OSCE and on some conflict issues.

We have used our chairmanship to prioritize Internet freedom, reflecting the increasing importance of the Internet as a platform for the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. A major conference in Dublin last June focused on how human rights and fundamental freedoms do not change with new technologies, but extend seamlessly into the digital age. We look forward to assuming the presidency of the European Union Council of Ministers in the first half of next year. We will bring to that role the same energy and commitment that we have devoted to discharging our OSCE responsibilities.

A distinguished Irish politician and lawyer of the late eighteenth century, John Philpot Curran, once remarked that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance". If we are to live up to the aspirations of the Charter of the United Nations, we must also assume the burden of eternal vigilance. The daily challenges to human rights are painfully obvious. Our response must be clear and unrelenting. In the words of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the promotion and protection of human rights is "the first responsibility" of Governments. We cannot and must not shy from that responsibility.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Spindelegger (Austria): The events of recent months have illustrated once again the importance of the United Nations as a multilateral forum for addressing today's crises and challenges. The conflicts in Syria and Mali and the ongoing reform processes in many parts of the Arab world demonstrate that we can face such challenges only through concerted action.

In Syria, thousands have lost their lives in their struggle for freedom and reform owing to crimes committed by a regime that denies them every basic human right in order to stay in power. Austria condemns the systematic human rights violations and bloodshed in Syria in the strongest possible terms. The more than 27,000 victims and some 2.5 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance are a stark reminder for each and every one of us that it is high time for the United Nations to finally act. The Security Council, in particular, must assume its responsibilities in relation to the ever-worsening situation in the country. Violence has to stop immediately, and both sides have to engage in a meaningful dialogue facilitated by Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi. There will be no solution unless President Al-Assad steps aside and gives way to the forces of reason and reconciliation.

Austria continues to fully support the ongoing transition processes in the Arab world. We welcome the efforts undertaken so far to lay the foundations for more open, inclusive and prosperous societies. We encourage the newly empowered authorities to fulfil their mandate for democratic change responsibly. The aspirations of the people for dignity and freedom must be satisfied, thereby contributing to peace and stability in the region.

In that context, let me reiterate my strongest condemnation of the recent attacks on diplomatic missions and personnel, especially the murder of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three of his colleagues in Benghazi. Violence is never an acceptable response to the exercise of the fundamental right of freedom of speech. To attack an Embassy and its personnel is not only contrary to international law but an attack on the very ideals that the United Nations stands for, namely, the peaceful cooperation of Member States to build a better future together.

The still unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to gravely destabilize the Middle East. The terms of a negotiated and sustainable solution — two States with secure and mutually recognized borders — have been discussed over and over again and are broadly supported by the people and the international community, and yet we experienced a complete lack of progress in the last year. We therefore call on the leadership on both sides to finally assume their responsibilities and enable a lasting peace and security to be established for their children and future generations.

The situation in Mali also continues to be a matter of grave concern. Austria has been dismayed by the political turmoil, with its disastrous effects on the Malian population. Growing insecurity and the continued deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation call for concerted action. The high-level meeting held on Wednesday was an important signal that we are moving in that direction. We fully support the efforts by the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union to try to find, together with the United Nations, a lasting political solution to the crisis in Mali and the Sahel region as a whole. Austria will advocate for increased support from the European Union to contribute to that end.

In the light of the crises and challenges the international community is facing, Austria welcomes President Jeremić's timely choice of theme to highlight the peaceful settlement of disputes in this year's general debate. Prevention is always better — and cheaper — than a cure. The progress made in Sierra Leone, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and Myanmar testifies how successful sustainable mediation efforts can be.

The peaceful settlement of disputes can be achieved only through open dialogue, based on mutual respect. Austria has a long-standing tradition of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue. We are proud to host the fifth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Vienna. It will take place on 27 and 28 February 2013, under the title "Responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue". Austria highly values the contribution of youth as a transformative force. Therefore, the day before the Global Forum will be dedicated to the Alliance of Civilizations youth event in order to benefit from their views.

In that context, I am also pleased to inform that the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue will be inaugurated on 26 November in Vienna. The Centre, a joint initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Austria, will certainly offer a significant contribution to the promotion of dialogue.

We need to be clear that sustainable peace and development go hand in hand with respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These are universal values that no human being should be denied. We must not falter until this goal is achieved. In 2011, Austria was elected to the Human Rights Council. We fully support the Council and its mechanisms, especially the universal periodic review. The Council is best placed to react swiftly in case of human rights emergencies. Its special sessions on Syria and Libya illustrated that the international community will not turn a blind eye on gross human rights violations and indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population. Human rights abuses must not go unpunished. Violations must be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators must be held accountable before credible judicial institutions, including the International Criminal Court.

Our membership of the Human Rights Council is an opportunity to continue working on the key priorities that Austria pursued during its Security Council membership in 2009 and 2010: the protection of civilians, the safety of journalists, the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the freedom of religion and belief, and the protection of children from violence and abuse.

The High-level Meeting of 24 September was an important opportunity to renew our commitment to the rule of law at the national and international levels. It now needs an adequate follow-up. As chair of the Group of Friends of the Rule of Law, Austria will provide concrete proposals for the upcoming report of the Secretary-General.

The various United Nations headquarters in Vienna are a hub for promoting peace and security. The work of the International Atomic Energy Agency is more relevant than ever. I am pleased that we can now also draw on additional services from the new office of the Office for Disarmament Affairs established in Vienna.

Austria is deeply concerned about programmes for weapons of mass destruction and proliferation activities in several regions of the world. The creation of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is more urgent than ever. In that respect, let me underline that Iran must finally give credible evidence for the peaceful nature of its nuclear programmeme and engage in earnest in the talks with the European Union three plus one group. The continued inability to even initiate substantive multilateral disarmament negotiations is unacceptable. Austria is committed to working with other interested States to move forward on that crucial issue. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his continued support in that matter.

We need to move beyond a strictly military security approach that originates from the Cold War period. It is time to change the discourse on nuclear weapons. Any use of nuclear weapons would be devastating for the whole world in its humanitarian and environmental effects. In the twenty-first century, such an existential threat to humankind can no longer be handled exclusively by a few States as a national security matter.

Austria is committed to strengthening and further developing international law and a humanitarian approach to advance the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. A lot has been achieved in the past two decades, as evidenced by the successful conclusions of the conventions to ban anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. We hope that similar progress can be achieved on the arms trade treaty in the coming months. Other Member States should join the emerging consensus on regulating the trade in arms in a comprehensive manner.

Vienna and its United Nations headquarters also serve as a platform for the discussion on sustainable development. We welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to establish an implementation office for his Sustainable Energy for All initiative. That will help to advance this important agenda. Universal access to energy and the improvement of energy efficiency, along with a higher share of renewable energy, are goals that will help bring electricity to the billion and a half people worldwide lacking access. Equally, it will help control greenhouse gas emissions and global warming, which threaten the very existence of many Member States.

This year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development marked the beginning of a new era, renewing the prospects for future generations via the sustainable development goals, as tailored to the needs of different countries or groups of States and regions. While implementing those new global goals, we should not cease our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015.

Austria remains fully committed to an effective multilateral system. Therefore we will support the efforts of the President of the Assembly and of the Secretary-General to further increase the effectiveness of our Organization in order to better enable us to face the challenges of our time.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Samuel Santos López, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Mr. Santos López (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): As I address the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, I would like first of all to convey the warm greetings and solidarity of the people of Nicaragua and its Government of national reconciliation and unity, led by Comrade President Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra, who wishes us success in our work.

The changes now taking place in science, economy, geopolitics, technology, ecology and culture are truly revolutions in the life of all human societies around the world, but they raise doubts about the effectiveness of international organizations in conducting global affairs. The situation in the world today proves that when governance is conceived and conducted from the perspective of global capitalism — savage, as it was called by His Holiness Pope John Paul II — instead of becoming a factor for positive transformation, as we were led to believe it would, it can lead us to the edge of civilization.

The vertiginous development of speculative venture capital in developed countries has reduced the role of the State in public affairs. The market imposes itself in all areas — the economy, politics, culture, society, individuals and the mass media — thus strengthening the influence of the interests of giant corporations involved in food production, communications, medicine and the military-industrial complex. They are the real power in decisions having a global impact; their decisions determine the course of many important events related to the economy and to peace. That is totally contrary to the idea that gave rise to our Organization. That situation is aggravated by the growing sense that, increasingly, well-being and world power are completely in the hands of market and finance elites, that the people's standards of living are dramatically crumbling and that confidence in the capacity of all Governments to solve the most pressing problems is decreasing at an accelerating pace.

Mr. Balé (Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The impact of the economic and financial crisis on the centres of power of global capitalism is provoking political and social changes with great international repercussions. The United States and European countries, paradigms of that egotistical model, are at a loss to find solutions to their structural problems. They drag their citizens and the world into unemployment, social insecurity and greater poverty. Thus the exclusive nature of the privatization of the State and its subjection to market forces, speculation and financial fraud becomes clear, demonstrating the urgent need for equitable distribution of wealth worldwide.

Many outstanding thinkers describe the scenario as a struggle between the market and the State. However, the paradox is that the very State that wanted to find the paradigm for development in the greater comfort of its citizens is one that today, without political scruples or ethics, develops a new neoliberal programme, disguised as necessary adjustments to save the economy and defend the citizens. That reveals that in developed countries, the economy, the market and political power are the same thing. In them, the State has evolved only to merge into one programme the interests of speculative financial capital, of large global corporations and industries and of the military-industrial complex. We are certain that the nature of these adjustments is permanent, and that it is a new economic agenda that will direct the greatest concentration of power to the highest global level in the quest to dictate the path of a new capitalist model that in all spheres of life is ever more concentrated.

The world of 1945, after the Second World War, gave rise to all the institutions that constitute global governance, beginning with our Organization. That world no longer exists. Thus today as never before it is imperative that we re-establish a philosophy of firm and lasting world peace and of economic development for the benefit of all the peoples of the world — that is, the philosophy that inspired the founders of the United Nations system, the philosophy of global governability and management.

In that connection, we reiterate the urgency of making progress in the reform of the United Nations system, or rather in its reinvention. Nicaraguans have the honour of having taken the initiative in this matter. Our brother, the former Foreign Minister of Nicaragua and President of the the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, together with President Daniel Ortega Saavedra and other great present-day thinkers, have taken on the task of developing a plan for the reinvention of the United Nations system. We say "reinvent" because the present Organization no longer permits reforms; those that have been proposed so far have not made progress, due the policy of some permanent members of the Security Council. In the name of the people of Nicaragua, I invite all to strongly push for that proposal, in order to make a reality of a new Charter of the United Nations that guarantees democratization of the Organization.

Peace is a supreme value and a condition in which human activity can develop in a stable manner beneficial for all. However, some developments establish a dangerous path.

We consider the economic, commercial and financial blockade of Cuba a flagrant violation of international law and the most basic norms of peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, today it is claimed that that blockade is based on the arbitrary, groundless and unilateral inclusion of that fraternal country in a list of States sponsoring international terrorism. We demand the immediate and unconditional end of that crime against humanity, which constitutes an affront to the conscience of our peoples. We also demand the immediate and unconditional release of the five Cuban patriots who are unjustly kept in prison in the United States of America.

We demand respect for the sovereignty and independence of the fraternal Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which faces a wave of conspiratorial actions seeking to destabilize and destroy the democratic plan of the Bolivarian Revolution and the popular interests, thus undermining the enormous social and economic gains obtained by the Venezuelan people through great effort and courage, with the distinguished leadership of President Hugo Chávez Frias.

The peace process in Colombia should be fully supported in order for the people to start on a path of true social progress.

International law should be given unrestricted support as regards the inviolability of Ecuador's diplomatic Mission in the United Kingdom. We also reaffirm our support of Argentina's sovereign rights over the Malvinas Islands and the right of Puerto Rico to obtain its full independence.

Bearing in mind the information disseminated daily by the world's main communication media, it has escaped no one's attention that there is a risk of widespread war in the Middle East. The situation in

Syria is unacceptable. We strongly condemn the acts of terrorism that have cost the lives of high-level officials of President Bashar Al-Assad's Government and of the population of Syria. Nicaragua recalls that it is a form of aggression that was already condemned by the International Court of Justice in 1986 in the case of *The Republic of Nicaragua v. The United States of America*. It is evident that the mediation promoted by the United Nations is going nowhere, simply because it is being blocked by the members of NATO and their allies with interests in the region.

A peaceful solution with regard to the Islamic Republic of Iran should be promoted. We need to resolve without delay the aspirations of the Palestinian people by supporting the peace negotiations and their legitimate right to their own State and to be part of the United Nations. We strongly condemn the terrorist acts in Benghazi, Libya, on 11 September, in which United States Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other United States citizens lost their lives, just as we condemn any act of terrorism that is an assault on civilization, culture, religion and justice anywhere in the world.

We welcome the recent positive developments with regard to the relationship between China/Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. We have to address the legitimate aspirations of Taiwan to participate more broadly in all United Nations specialized agencies and organs.

We reaffirm our commitment to total and complete disarmament and international security. A world free of nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction is indispensable.

On a different matter, Central America is a transit zone for the drugs produced in the South and that find in the North, in the United States, their largest consumer market and the largest money-laundering operation for the traffic in drugs. Central America has expressed the need for destination countries to eradicate drug trafficking and consumption within their borders, using all the technology and resources at their disposal. Likewise, we have agreed to demand economic support for all of Central America in its constant struggle against organized crime and drug trafficking. However, the slow pace or lack of commitment to that issue does irreparable damage, especially to the peoples of Mesoamerica, who have to allocate enormous resources for the prohibition and interception of drugs, consequently delaying our social investments.

In that scenario, which is not very encouraging and in which we are far from being triumphant, Latin America and the Caribbean are making great strides in strengthening their economic, political, social and cultural integration and unity through the Central American Integration System, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Our regional process of integration and unity through the Central American Integration System advances consistently and on solid ground, based on the common objectives that further the peace and economic and social development of Central Americans. Our model for integration and unity is also evident in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, which has a component of fair trade, complementarity, cooperation and solidarity among its members. Another expression of this process is the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which was established in 2011 and is convincing proof of our integrationist calling.

The principles and purposes of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries constitute a broad common platform, which has world reach and is contributing to the development of a multipolar world and to the strengthening of peace and international security. In that context, our Government of national reconciliation and unity, presided over by Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra, and our people are achieving important results in the struggle against poverty. That strengthens the process of restoring rights, which translates into more health, better education, more productive and service-oriented infrastructure, and a higher living standard for all our citizens.

Very soon we will have transformed our energy matrix, using sources of renewable energy, so that by 2017, 94 per cent of energy consumed will be renewable energy. We have decided to take the necessary steps for the construction of the great inter-ocean canal through Nicaragua for ships weighing more than 250,000 tons.

Climate change and all its related effects constitute one of the most formidable challenges of our time. The developed countries should comply with their legally binding environmental commitments. The valuable natural resources of our planet must not be privatized in favour of a few.

Furthermore, in times of crisis, we can see that we run the risk of not reaching all of the Millennium Development Goals that we proposed to reach by 2015. We cannot allow that to happen. The commitments of the developed countries to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance must be honoured.

Another grave problem is that of food insecurity. The food crisis is a serious obstacle in the struggle against poverty and hunger. We must work together to universally restore that right to the peoples. Our societies are struggling with the urgency of satisfying their most basic needs, with equitable profits from the benefits of development and with the importance of developing democracies based on representation and direct participation of the citizens. That is a road whose specificities must be respected without interference of any kind.

Dangers lurk and have resulted in events that do not contribute to our political stability. Coups d'état, such as those attempted in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador or those carried out in Honduras and Paraguay, must be condemned and rejected, regardless of how they are executed or attempted. We cannot allow coups to once again become entrenched as methods for a political solution to conflicts, whether within any country or between States.

We cannot ignore that the process of concentration of global power has repercussions in the political and social systems governing our societies. The final blow is intended to destroy or break up popular social movements in order to eliminate States and Governments that do not align themselves with the neoliberal model. Therefore, in the progressive or revolutionary national projects manifested through the nation States of our Latin and Caribbean America, our citizens, our peoples, are called to resist and to raise banners of peace, dignity, identity and national sovereignty.

We are constructing a new world governance with our work to transform international institutions. We are strengthening a new world governance by incorporating more and more citizens in the work of building this new world to which we aspire. The present global order and its institutions are at an impasse. The only headway being made is through the new effort I am describing to deeply transform the economy, politics, society and culture. That effort alone will endure as the fruit of the best of our human nature and our history. The other world, the world that refuses change, the world of war and human misery, the world of the apocalypse being announced on television as a novelty, will fail. The hope and the future for which we struggle will grow and shine on its remains.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): For over a year and a half, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa has been the nerve centre of global politics. The deep changes that have swept over the region intertwine with the key problems of modern international relations and require everyone to take a comprehensive approach and to reject simplistic and ideology-driven patterns and double standards.

Russia has consistently supported peoples in their aspiration to determine their destiny and to pave the way to more effective models of public governance. We believe it is particularly important to carry out those transformations in a non-violent way and without outside interference. We strongly believe that all members of the international community should be interested in making the Middle East-North Africa region peaceful, stable, democratic and free from domestic and inter-State conflicts. So far, however, there has been no progress in reaching unanimity in the efforts of outside players to create conditions for achieving that goal.

Of particular concern is the deepening internal conflict in Syria. We have consistently called for consolidated efforts by the international community to compel the Government and its opponents to immediately cease the violence, come to the negotiating table and work out a compromise on the content and pace of reforms that would satisfy all Syrians and ensure the safety and rights of all ethnic and religious groups. That was the substance of the consensus recorded in the final communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/523, annex), agreed upon in Geneva as a follow-up to the Kofi Annan plan.

We call upon all members of the Action Group to fully abide by the commitments we all took on in Geneva. That is the fastest way to stop the loss of human life in Syria. We proposed a Security Council resolution endorsing the Geneva communiqué as the basis for negotiations at the beginning of the transitional period, but that proposal was blocked. Those who oppose the implementation of the Geneva communiqué bear an onerous responsibility. They insist on a ceasefire by the Government alone and encourage the opposition to intensify hostilities, in fact pushing Syria even deeper into the abyss of bloody internecine strife. The militarization of the conflict continues, with calls for open intervention.

Extremist organizations including Al-Qaida have become more active in Syria. They perpetrate terrorist attacks against innocent civilians and civil infrastructure. The number of war crimes is growing, on the part of both Government forces and the opposition, as recorded in the recent report of the Human Rights Council's commission of inquiry (A/HRC/21/50).

Russia resolutely condemns any violence, wherever it comes from, and is convinced that there is still an opportunity to undertake collective action. Practical steps to overcome the crisis need to begin with a comprehensive ceasefire, the release of prisoners and hostages and the provision of additional humanitarian aid. That would create the conditions to start an inter-Syrian dialogue. We hope that Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, will be able to bring his vast experience to bear on moving towards an agreement on such arrangements, with the support of the international community. Russia will provide its full support to promote the success of his mission.

The changes taking place in the Middle East should not marginalize the Palestinian problem. The achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting Arab-Israeli settlement, which should lead, among other results, to the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting in peace and security with Israel, would be a major contribution to the normalization of the overall regional situation. The Arab Peace Initiative fully retains its relevance, and we support the efforts of the League of Arab States to move it forward.

I also wish to stress the importance of implementing the decision on convening in 2012 a conference on establishing in the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery (see NPT/CONF/2010/50 (Vol.I)). It is clearly necessary to ensure the participation in the conference of all States in the region, and they should agree on key arrangements among themselves. In that matter, the League of Arab States should play an important role.

On the whole, we support closer ties between the United Nations and regional entities. I would note that in our part of the world today a memorandum on cooperation was signed between the secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. I am convinced that it will increase the efficiency of common efforts to ensure stability and security.

All our actions should be founded solidly on the United Nations Charter, which makes no provision for the right to change regimes. It is unacceptable to impose a political system on a country and its people. Our position was clearly stated by President Vladimir Putin speaking at the Kremlin on 26 September. The entire sequence of events in the Arab world and other regions proves the futility of any such policy, which can lead to dangerous interethnic and interreligious clashes in international relations.

We believe it is an obligation of all States to protect from provocations and blasphemy the religious feelings of people of any religious affiliation. At the same time, of course, there can be no justification for acts of terror, regardless of where they are committed, be they in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen or anywhere else. Attacks against diplomats or United Nations personnel are absolutely unacceptable.

In general, we are convinced that today, when the world is going through a transition period characterized by instability in the spheres of the economy, politics and inter-civilizational relations, it is particularly important for United Nations Member States to be able to rely on accepted rules of conduct and to agree on a joint response to the threats to global stability. We should not allow irresponsible actions dictated by expedient interests to shatter the system of international law. The world order is threatened by arbitrary interpretation of such essential principles as the non-use or threat of force, the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs.

Those are the key principles of the United Nations Charter, which confers the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security on the Security Council. In advancing the reform of the United Nations, it is essential to preserve the capacity of the Security Council to perform those functions. Their erosion would deprive the international community of an essential mechanism for developing joint approaches to the settlement of crisis situations.

It is appropriate to mention the compulsory instruments at the disposal of the United Nations. Under the United Nations Charter the imposition of sanctions falls exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Security Council. Decisions must be made on a collegial basis, with the understanding that sanctions should not lead to isolation of the State targeted for sanctions, but rather encourage it to engage in a dialogue to remove questions that the Member States may have. It is essential that sanctions should be well-measured and that they not cause any suffering to the population. In the past the Security Council has discussed the issue of the humanitarian limits of sanctions, but somehow the discussions have faded away. We believe it is important to resume them.

Another issue that needs to be discussed in the Security Council is the consequences of unilateral sanctions imposed by a State or a group of States sidestepping the United Nations to advance their political goals. We have no doubt that such sanctions, especially when they are applied extraterritorially, weaken the unity of the international community and undermine the effectiveness of its efforts. For many years, the commercial, economic and financial restrictions imposed by the United States on Cuba have remained an illustration of the negative impact of unilateral sanctions. Russia, together with the overwhelming majority of members of the international community, calls for the swift lifting of the blockade, which is a relic of the Cold War.

Special attention should be given to the practical enforcement of Security Council decisions regarding sanctions against non-State actors and illegal cross-border formations. In general, the events of recent years have clearly shown that unilateral action which violates international law and circumvents or distorts the decisions of the Security Council does no good.

Of course, the legal norms of international affairs will be further adjusted as necessary. But these transformations should be treated with the greatest sense of responsibility and full consciousness of the serious risks involved. Consensus should be the sole route to their adoption. Violations of international law should not be portrayed as some sort of creative development.

All of this is related to the debate regarding the concept of the so-called responsibility to protect. Further discussion of this concept should be held on the basis of the approach agreed on at the 2005 World Summit, which reaffirmed the need to observe the principles of the Charter of the United Nations when responding to conflicts within States. The protection of civilians is an issue far too serious to be exploited to achieve political goals. The ambiguity of the so-called responsibility-to-protect concept can be better understood in light of initiatives formulated by Brazil and several other States to move towards consensus.

Let us not forget that the founders of the United Nations, in their wisdom, agreed upon and endorsed a Charter that enshrined principles for the regulation of a multipolar world order. Now that the abnormal bipolar period of the Cold War is over, and now that it has become clear to all that there is no place for monopolarity in the modern world and international affairs can only be polycentric, we have a unique chance to fully implement the original potential of that Charter.

This is a difficult challenge. International relations are clearly experiencing a lack of credibility. We regard this as the main obstacle to practical progress towards the establishment of universal foundations for equal and indivisible security, whether in the Euro-Atlantic area, Asia-Pacific region or other parts of the world. Such a state of affairs clearly contradicts the concept of collective security embodied in the Charter and the deep interdependence of the modern world, where most challenges and threats are common to us all and have a cross-border dimension.

Strengthening confidence and collective principles in international affairs, with the emphasis on negotiating the pursuit of compromise solutions, would help substantially reduce the level of instability and move forward in the settlement of crisis situations, not only in the Middle East, but also with respect to Iran, Afghanistan, the Korean peninsula and other situations throughout the world.

The final goal of the efforts to settle a conflict is to ensure the right to life and other fundamental human rights, be they political, economic or social. The events of recent years confirm that, without lasting peace and sustainable development, it is impossible to ensure human rights. In turn, the protection of human rights should contribute to security and development, rather than serve as a pretext for illegal interference in the domestic affairs of States.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to an international order in which their rights can be fully realized. Those who use military force and sanctions, bypassing the Charter, engage in illicit supplies of arms, or provide cover for terrorists grossly violate this right.

Russia stands for the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and respect for the traditional values on which human civilization is based and where all world religions converge. This is a moral foundation of modern society. It is the cement that bonds together nations and peoples. In recent years, these values have been put to the test by displays of immorality, extremism and racial intolerance. Of similar concern are the even more assertive actions of those who, citing freedom of speech, condone the glorification of the Nazis and their accomplices and desecrate the memory of the victims of the Second World War and the victors of fascism. Such actions are incompatible with the obligations of States under the Charter of the United Nations.

Let me recall that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights directly prohibits the propaganda of war and incitement of national and religious discord. This means that freedom of speech and assembly cannot be used to justify the promotion of Nazi or other radical or extremist views, in violation of the basic principles and norms of international law.

Yesterday, the Human Rights Council endorsed a resolution proposed by Russia on the interrelation of human rights and traditional values. It is regrettable that a number of Western States voted against this document, which is especially relevant today.

Progress towards genuine partnership in international relations is possible only on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The course of events in the world leaves no alternative for anyone but to join efforts in order to build a stable, equitable and democratic international system. It would be possible to resist this objective trend and try to preserve the old order for some time, but such resistance would cost yet more lives, suffering and destruction. Let us display our vision and, instead of looking back at the history of previous centuries, take the side of the events unfolding before us today, and answer the call for strong collective statesmanship.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sisoulith (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Vuk Jeremić upon his election to serve as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. It is my firm belief that, with his extensive experience and constructive initiatives, he will guide the Assembly towards achieving its objectives while serving the common interests of all its members.

May I also take this opportunity to extend my profound congratulations to Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, on the successful discharge of his duties.

Likewise, I would like to commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for tirelessly leading United Nations efforts to meet its obligations and achieve its objectives, as well as working to improve the overall working methods of the United Nations.

Over the past two years, the international community has encountered complex challenges in all areas. Regional political complexity and unrest, especially in the Middle East, seem unlikely to be resolved any time soon. The use of violence in any form, as seen in attacks on diplomatic compounds in Syria, is unacceptable to us. In addition, the global economic and financial crisis affecting all parts of the world has reached an alarming point, causing great concern for all nations, and even for the European Union — a major economic force.

Such crises have challenged the capacity and credibility of the existing global governance mechanisms designed by the international community to address global challenges. This is a clear indication that our joint efforts and actions have not yet produced tangible outcomes.

Negotiations on climate change have shown no progress, although the Kyoto Protocol is expiring this year. Efforts to formulate an international instrument to govern arms trade and prevent illegal trading, which started some years ago, have also failed. There has also been little commitment on the part of the developed countries to help the most vulnerable groups of countries: the least developed countries (LDCs), the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and the small island developing States.

In the light of the current situation, it is more crucial than ever to strengthen the United Nations, the only universal Organization, in order to increase its effectiveness in addressing important global issues. To that end, all Member States should strive to extend their full support and cooperation to revitalize the United Nations, finding a harmonious balance between national and international interests in order to address the enormous global challenges in a timely and effective manner.

In the current context, regional organizations have played an increasingly important role in addressing the global issues. In that connection, more and more countries in the world now attach greater importance to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the ever-expanding ASEAN-initiated cooperation frameworks. ASEAN is entering a crucial stage in implementing its leaders' commitment to establishing an ASEAN community comprised of three pillars — a political-security community, an economic community and a social-cultural community — by 2015. I firmly believe that, by utilizing its own resources combined with external support, especially from its dialogue partners, ASEAN will be able to realize its ultimate goal of becoming a community that is politically stable, economically integrated and socially and culturally harmonious, thus contributing to the cause of peace and prosperity in the region and the world at large.

As a member of the international community, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has done its utmost to fulfil its international obligations by pursuing a policy of cooperation with other countries based on the principles of equality, mutual benefit, and respect for the principles of national independence, sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, thus building an international environment conducive to national development.

Over the past year, despite numerous challenges, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has continued to enjoy political stability and social order. There has been good progress in developing the national economy. That has laid a solid foundation for attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and created conditions conducive to the country's graduation from least developed country status by 2020.

Despite those achievements, the Lao People's Democratic Republic continues to face numerous challenges and constraints. In addition to problems resulting from the global and regional economic crises, natural calamities and the remnants of war, such as unexploded ordnance, continue to harm people's lives and pose major obstacles to national social and economic development, including the attainment of the MDGs. In that regard, we call upon all countries to become party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions with a view to fully banning the use of such weapons.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic feels honoured to be entrusted with hosting the 9th Asia-Europe Summit Meeting, which will be held on 5 and 6 November in Vientiane, the capital of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. That will provide a great opportunity for the leaders of Asia and Europe to discuss and exchange their views on global issues of mutual interest.

The international community wishes to see the restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East. The conflict between Israel and Palestine will not be resolved without the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions supporting the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace. The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its support for the membership of Palestine to the United Nations.

The economic, financial and trade embargo imposed on the Republic of Cuba has long caused considerable hardship to the standard of living of the Cuban people. That embargo must be unconditionally and immediately lifted.

Owing to their geographical locations, the landlocked developing countries are among the most vulnerable Members of the United Nations. The special challenges and major development obstacles they face are the result of their great distance from world markets and high transit transport costs, which impede their national sustainable development efforts. Each year, the landlocked countries bear a heavy financial burden in the effort to improve their transit transport infrastructure network in order to ensure that their export products, which constitute a crucial part of their national income, have better access to world markets. Those problems are compounded when their national economies are affected by financial or social crises, natural disasters and climate change, inter alia. In addition, 50 per cent of the LLDCs are also LDCs. I therefore urge the international community to devote greater attention and provide assistance to that vulnerable group of countries through full implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, as well as to play an active part in the 10-year review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, to be held in 2014.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic reiterates once again its firm commitment and determination to continue working closely with the international community to build a peaceful world under a just and more democratic new order, based on cooperation with all countries in tackling the various global challenges facing us. I am convinced that only through firm determination will we be able to achieve the immediate and long-term development objectives and ensure that the world is secure, peaceful and prosperous.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kim Sung-hwan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Kim Sung-hwan (Republic of Korea): Allow me at the outset to express my sincere congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I have every confidence that under his able leadership this session will be crowned with great success.

Humankind continues to advance, drawing on our collective wisdom to address challenges throughout human history. Although new global challenges to mankind such as climate change, poverty and disease, underdevelopment, terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are now testing the international community, I have no doubt that we will overcome those challenges on our future path.

The United Nations, the symbol of our collective wisdom, should take greater responsibility in coping with the challenges. I note with great satisfaction that the United Nations is becoming a more accountable and trusted international Organization under the prominent leadership of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In that regard, I recognize and support the Secretary-General's five-year Action Agenda, which I believe will guide us in addressing current world challenges and onward towards the future we are aiming for.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June in Rio de Janeiro, represented a critical step forward towards ushering in the world we hope for. The outcome document, entitled "The future we want" (resolution 66/288, annex), marks a substantial advancement for sustainable development. The task before us now is to capitalize on our achievements thus far and exert even greater effort on follow-up actions such as developing sustainable development goals, strengthening the institutional framework and mobilizing finance.

As part of such endeavours, the Republic of Korea established the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). Sixteen countries signed the agreement to establish the GGGI on the margins of the Rio+20 meeting, and the Institute will be launched as an international organization starting in October. The GGGI will engage in a range of activities for disseminating the green growth paradigm, in which the economy and the environment form a virtuous cycle. Moreover, the Korean Government is prepared to step up its contribution to international efforts to achieve a sustainable future by hosting the secretariat of the Green Climate Fund. The Republic of Korea stands ready to render wholehearted support for the successful launch and stable operation of the Fund.

The Republic of Korea is keen on contributing to the balanced and harmonious development of the international community and is fully cooperating in such efforts in the context of the United Nations. The Korean Government continues to increase its official development assistance to help achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The Republic of Korea underscored the importance of inclusive growth and development partnership at the 2010 Seoul Summit of the Group of Twenty and the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan in 2011. In June, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation was launched for the implementation of the Busan commitments. The Busan Forum and the launch of the Global Partnership will mark a turning point for international development cooperation by broadening our perspective from aid effectiveness to development effectiveness.

Our own experience has taught us that investment in education is at the heart of effective development. In that vein, we are confident that the Education First initiative of the Secretary-General will, indeed, provide a solid foundation for achieving the international development goals. The Korean Government extends its strong support for the initiative.

The Republic of Korea is also taking an active part in the discussions on shaping the post-2015 development framework. We fully recognize the importance of a comprehensive approach that takes into account the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The aspiration for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic values is the primary driving force for the advancement of humanity. Today, many countries have been striving to advocate human rights in tandem with democracy. The United Nations, as the epicentre of the international community's efforts to promote and protect human rights, has provided timely assistance to such countries.

Recently, we witnessed the strong desire of people in the Middle East and North Africa to realize their aspirations for democracy and respect for human rights. The recent positive developments in Myanmar are also well worth noting in that regard. However, while those changes are still unfolding, enormous challenges and difficulties still lie ahead. In Syria, a great number of civilians have been killed and gross violations of human rights have been witnessed. With high hopes towards the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, the Korean Government will stand by the Syrian people through this time of suffering together with the international community.

The Korean Government expresses deep concern at the recent attacks against diplomats and diplomatic missions in several places. Such violence cannot be justified regardless of the motivation.

Putting an end to sexual violence against women in armed conflict is another issue that warrants serious attention. Wartime sexual violence is a fundamental infringement of human rights and is, in fact, an affront to human dignity and integrity. History has left important lessons that warn against such egregious acts.

The Republic of Korea would like to urge the United Nations system and all Member States to do their utmost to put an end to such atrocities, not only by taking all measures to protect women and girls in armed conflict, but also by providing effective remedies and reparations for victims and ending impunity by bringing the offenders to justice in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Both a sound historical consciousness and a heartfelt soul-searching into any past wrongdoings are required in order to establish solid peace and stability between nations. A country's true valour is proven when it confronts the dark side of its history and endeavours to rectify past wrongdoings.

It is the firm conviction of the Korean Government that respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, should be the guiding principle for stable international relations.

No country should abuse international legal procedures or the concept of the rule of law in order to infringe upon the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries or distort historical justice.

The Republic of Korea is actively contributing to the global efforts being undertaken in pursuit of a world without nuclear weapons. The Seoul Nuclear Security Summit held last March brought together leaders from across the world to galvanize the vision and the determination of the international community to achieve a peaceful world without nuclear terrorism. During the Summit, the Korean Government played a leading role in forging a consensus to take important practical steps, such as the substantial reduction of nuclear materials, the promotion of the universality of international conventions and cooperation to combat illicit trafficking of nuclear materials. I am delighted that the High-level Meeting on Countering Nuclear Terrorism, which was convened this morning, has provided new momentum to further energize the efforts seen at the Seoul Summit for the prevention of nuclear and radiological terrorism.

Furthermore, existing and emerging threats in cyberspace, such as rampant transnational cybercrime and potential cyber conflicts, present a serious challenge. It is therefore imperative that the international community address those threats. By hosting the 2013 Conference on Cyberspace, the Republic of Korea hopes to contribute in multiple ways to the ongoing global efforts to maximize the benefits of digital networks. We further believe that the event will provide an unparalleled opportunity to pool our efforts to cope with threats stemming from the misuse of information and communication technologies.

The North Korean nuclear programme continues to pose a threat, not only to the security of the Korean peninsula and North-East Asia, but indeed to the very basis of the international non-proliferation regime. As long as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continues to pursue its nuclear and missile programmes, achieving the goal of sustainable peace on the Korean peninsula and in the region will remain far off. Unfortunately, the international community's aspirations were shattered once again when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea launched a long-range missile in April 2012. In response to that provocative action, the Security Council reaffirmed that the international community will not tolerate the continued pursuit by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of its nuclear and missile programmes by issuing a firm and resolute presidential statement in an unprecedentedly swift manner (S/PRST/2012/13).

We urge with concern that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea should take concrete measures aimed at denuclearization, which will also open an avenue to improving the livelihood of its people. At the same time, we sincerely hope that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will listen to the international community's call for the improvement of that country's human rights situation, as repeatedly affirmed in the relevant United Nations resolutions.

As a country that has risen from the ashes of war, we have learned the values of peace and security. In that context, we earnestly hope to have the opportunity to promote such values by serving as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the 2013-2014 term. The Republic of Korea is determined to fulfil that role with the greatest enthusiasm and devotion. We hope that States Members of the United Nations understand and support our bid for membership in the Council.

We are united by the ideals set out in the United Nations Charter. In pursuit of international peace and security, the continued promotion of social and economic development and the promotion of human rights, we should embrace a spirit of cooperation and tolerance, with the United Nations at the centre of international efforts to that end. The Republic of Korea will persist in fully playing its part in the invaluable work of the United Nations, taking on the various challenges that humanity will continue to confront.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, it gives me great pleasure to convey to Mr. Vuk Jeremić my sincere congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. We wish him every success in the performance of his duties and responsibilities, particularly under the current critical circumstances in which the international community finds itself at present. I would also take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to his predecessor, Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session, who fulfilled his mandate with wisdom and professionalism. Moreover, it gives me pleasure to commend once more the great efforts of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in serving the Organization and promoting its message aimed at achieving international peace and security, especially under difficult and critical circumstances.

The Palestinian issue, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, has been a constant challenge for the United Nations since its inception more than 60 years ago. The cause of the stalemate is Israel's attitude. We all know how intransigent Israel has been in its positions, which have undermined negotiations and have emptied all discussions of any meaning. Moreover, Israel has taken unilateral actions that could lead to more complications in the occupied Palestinian territories and to undermining the efforts of Arab countries and others in the international community to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting solution by establishing an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

The situation requires that the international community, as represented by the United Nations, move quickly in order to put an end to the calamity that the situation represents for the Palestinian people and provide all manner of support and assistance for the Palestinian Authority. My country finds that Palestine must receive full membership in the United Nations, as that is its natural and legitimate right, and we should all help the Palestinians to achieve that objective. For its part, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is sparing no effort in fulfilling its commitment to the peace process with respect to our Palestinian brethren by providing various types of support and assistance.

The issue of Syria is a very complex and exacerbated one and has led to the killing and displacement of tens of thousands of people. The international community has shown its inability to act, because of divisions in the Security Council and because of the failure of all Arab and international initiatives as a result of the intransigence of the Syrian regime, which still believes that it can use the power of its security apparatus to end the crisis without taking into account the high humanitarian cost.

Since the first day of the crisis, my country has been dealing with it in accordance with the framework and resolutions of international legitimacy and with full respect for the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law, through the Gulf Cooperation Council, the League of Arab States, the United Nations and the outcomes of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit meeting, held in Mecca in August, on the status of Syria.

The success of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi's efforts will depend on the implementation of a new strategy and a clear plan that aims at achieving a peaceful transition of power. The Security Council must provide him with the support he needs to deal with the Syrian crisis at both the political and the humanitarian levels.

We call upon our brothers in Yemen to continue to take the same positive and constructive approach and to stand against any foreign interference in their internal affairs in order to achieve security and stability and economic development throughout Yemen. Meanwhile, we call upon the international community to fulfil its pledges to Yemen by providing it with all forms of support and assistance to achieve those goals. Saudi Arabia reaffirms its full support for all international efforts undertaken in that context. We hosted the donors' conference, held earlier this month, and participated in the Friends of Yemen conference held at the United Nations on 27 September 2012.

The Iranian nuclear crisis is one of the most important challenges threatening international peace and security in general and the security and stability of the Arab Gulf region in particular. In that context, my country supports the ongoing efforts of the five plus one group to peacefully resolve the crisis in a manner that guarantees Iran and all countries in the region the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, in accordance with the criteria and procedures of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and under its supervision. On the other hand, we urge Iran to respond to those efforts and to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions by cooperating with IAEA inspectors monitoring its nuclear facilities in order to put an end to the crisis.

In that regard, Saudi Arabia reaffirms the importance of making the Middle East a zone free from nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. We also stress the need for Israel to place its nuclear facilities under the international inspection and safeguards of the IAEA and to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The security and stability of the Arab Gulf region will be reached only through the establishment of good relations based on good-neighbourliness and constructive cooperation. Also, Iran must end its occupation of the three islands belonging to the United Arab Emirates. We must solve that issue peacefully, either through bilateral negotiations or by referring the issue to the International Court of Justice.

The phenomenon of terrorism is one of the most important challenges that we currently face and the most important issue confronting the entire international community. We must eliminate terrorism in all its forms and sources. In order to fight that scourge and uproot it completely, the efforts of the Kingdom have not been limited to fighting it locally. We have reinforced efforts at all levels, whether regional or international, including by hosting an international conference in 2005 that resulted in many recommendations, including the establishment of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, which was launched in New York on 19 September 2011.

Our world today urgently needs to spread the culture of tolerance and understanding and dialogue between the followers of different religions. Our efforts in that regard are led by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, aimed at achieving a dialogue between religions and cultures. That was reflected in the 2008 World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid. There was also a call for a high-level meeting hosted by the United Nations to promote dialogue and tolerance between different cultures and religions. Our call for mutual understanding, the acceptance of others and coexistence has led to the establishment in Vienna of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Dialogue among Followers of Religions and Cultures. In addition, the foresight of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques was demonstrated by his announcement of the establishment of a centre for dialogue among

Islamic sects at the fourth special session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Mecca in August 2012.

In that regard, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly condemns the production by an irresponsible group of an offensive movie about the Prophet Muhammad — peace be upon him. The Kingdom asserts its rejection of all acts that offend or disdain religions and their sacred symbols. In that context, the Kingdom renews its call to enact the necessary laws and legislation that forbid the defamation and disdain of religions and their sacred symbols.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns the acts of violence against the United States foreign missions and any attack against any foreign or diplomatic mission around the world for any reason, regardless of the disagreement involved. Such acts prevent missions from carrying out their diplomatic functions and international interests.

In the light of the ongoing discussion on the question of global economic, social and human development, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, through its participation in the Group of Twenty, emphasizes its support of the efforts aiming to stabilize the global economy, to advance world trade, to take further action to liberalize trade and to avoid protectionist policies that impede the efforts to end the global financial crisis. Meanwhile, we should not ignore the matter of helping developing States to overcome the consequences of that crisis.

Furthermore, my country believes that efforts to reform the international financial, monetary and trade system should be channelled through existing institutions in order to build a global economic system that is based on a new partnership between developing and developed countries. That partnership should be established on the basis of cooperation, justice, equality, transparency and mutual benefits.

Concerning energy security, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has spared no effort in the pursuit of stability in the world oil markets in a manner that has served the development and growth of the global economy. In that regard, we cannot ignore the fact that energy security is not limited to the security of supply, but includes the security of demand as well. My country believes that there should be a dialogue between energy producers and consumers in order to avoid volatility and speculation in prices, and to avoid imposing discriminatory taxes on oil. We welcome the establishment of the Secretariat of the International Energy Forum headquarters in Riyadh in order to promote such dialogue.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as one of the United Nations founding countries, has since its inception participated in its meetings and conferences on the basis of its belief in the Organization's noble principles and the role it can play in service to humanity and its advancement.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will be at the vanguard of any international efforts aimed at implementing and achieving the principles and purposes of the United Nations and achieving the security, stability and prosperity to which we all aspire.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.